

The Long Watch in England

~~By Eugene and Ailine Lohrke~~

~~NIGHT OVER ENGLAND~~

~~By Eugene Lohrke~~

~~ARMAGEDDON: The World War in Literature~~

~~Novels~~

~~OVERSHADOWED~~

~~DEEP EVENING~~

~~THE FIRST BUS OUT~~

~~THE LONG EXILE~~



THE SUSSEX FARMHOUSE

Eugene and Arline Lohrke

*The Long Watch
in England*

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TO THE PEOPLE OF FARM, WORKSHOP
AND COTTAGE, WHO HAVE MEANT ENG-
LAND TO US, THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED IN
RESPECT AND GRATITUDE.

Authors' Note

In a short narrative, "Night Over England," published last year, we attempted to give an idea of the impact of the Munich crisis on the England we knew and in which we had been living for many years. To a certain extent this second book carries along the story of what has been happening in England from the time of Munich to the outbreak of the war, but we have also attempted to give a deeper and fuller account of the things that we have been watching happen in Britain during the years we lived there. We believe these things have crucial meaning for America today and for determining her future policy.

A part—perhaps a tenth—of this exploration appeared in a recent issue of Harper's magazine, but the bulk of the findings and observations here reported have not before been published. They will be rigidly tested by the history and time which lie just ahead of us.

New York City
March 20, 1940

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Part I
Frame and Picture

SURROUNDED BY HER ANCIENT PROVINCE, the sea, holding desperately to the image of her past securities, guarding her treasure with the force of her deep inner dismay, the ancient island world of England stands facing the future.

What holds her together today is the immense accumulated inertia of the ages in men's thought and habit and the profound resources collected in a century and a half of unparalleled expansion and power. An energy unequalled in the world since Rome reached out from that small green island wreathed in its eternal mists, from ports and harbors whose smoke drifted back over the face of the fairest rural landscape the earth has known. Now in a hundred valleys and plains, grimed with the smoke of the industrial era, the hammers of progress are done; the hammer still sounds, but only to beat out for the ancient island the new hard shell that is not for the future but only to defend the achievement of the past.

To anyone who has lived long and quietly close to the heart and history of England, a vision rises with every flick of the fire on the old hearth, and the vision cannot be denied. Through every country lane more lovely than its picture, over upland, dale and rock, the wild waste of her moors, the terrifying contours of her industrial towns, stretches a thin, veined hand. It is a hand from the past. The impulses of those old arteries are still very strong. Are they strong enough to hold and preserve her?

1. **T**HE SUMMER OF 1939 HAD COME as gently as ever to the Sussex fields and lanes, to the old farm under the downs, and the two Americans who lived there had again seen the dispersal of the winter-dank beneath the spreading carpet of Maybloom. We could watch as ever, bemused, the unfolding of seasons, the grape-hue of winter mists in the folds of the hills yielding to the first pastel, and in that tentative fading and change was again the symbol of our remoteness from the imperative summons and burning zest of American skies and seasons.

The changes which paint the English year in colors that partake of the mist had not failed to turn the land again from season to season; only the men and women who moved on that land had submerged themselves in a greater, vaguer background of human failure and now moved across the fields, bent backs and toiling hands supporting the burden and weight of the future. To those for whom daily tasks are enough, whose lives are limited by the fields on which they are born and die, hope ran only from season to season, from this month's Maybloom to the quiet-burning and higher skies that would mark the transition to harvest. Hope, other than this, was gone.

Sometimes in the long, clammy nights of that fatal summer we would wake in our beds on the Sussex farm

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to the steady, snoring drone of wings bent close over slumber, cutting the nearer fringes of darkness with the sense of a world rolling away and lost. How long had we stayed and watched the brief, poor candles of this "peace in our time" twisting and fluttering? It seemed that all our pleasant years in Sussex had been breathing spells between nightmare crises. The pulse once roused to that pitch would never be still. Fear was infectious, spreading, growing like a cancer. And because nerves now were blunted, a new feeling, a feeling of desperate carelessness, was growing over everything else.

In that sterile, wordless murk, the mills of the gods were grinding out savagely, and so were the mills that were grinding out tanks, battleships, planes, guns. And there was no one in power in Europe to stand up before his people and answer for what was to happen; only feeble voices repeating old, dry syllables, repeating that they had been duped when they should have known better, repeating that the country hadn't been prepared, repeating what every man knew in his heart of hearts to be false, that the peace that was falling from Europe like sere leaves from a sapless tree was to be forged anew with the sword. Saying this and saying that, and with every word digging their own pitfalls into which they would tumble clumsily later, bringing civilization with them as they clutched at the edge of the ditch.

Only the seasons and the fruit of the seasons were the same as they had been in the years since we had come

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to live in England. The fields were the same, the hills, the earth the same. The wilderness that had grown and was growing in England since Munich, and that had also grown and was spreading in Europe, cast no shadow on the fields; its rot and savage yield lay pressed down in the hearts of despairing men. The old temples were broken, the old gods had fled. Work and the rest after work were no longer the sanctuaries of simple men. The sanctuaries were deep underground in fresh-dug trenches and shelters, so like the grave that men who dug them stared down bemused and did not know what they stared at. The seasons grew and waned, and each season was the tick of a clock and men counted those clock-ticks and wondered which would be the last. Would it be seed-time or grasstime or harvest? When it came, would anything after it ever be the same?

Looking back on our own life experiences since the First World War, spent in many countries, living continually between the Old World and the New, we could recall how often we had come to Europe for the inner light that continuity and tranquillity of experience kindle. It had been, we thought, the great pull of Europe on Americans like us who liked to look at the surface of things for the growth that lay behind them and were worried by the foreshortened perspectives inherent in a bustling, eager, progressive, ever-changing country. In Europe, and in England more than in any other country in Europe,

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the present was never more than one surface of the past shoved into the foreground for immediate observation. Men are, in a way, dependent on this kind of continuity. Too many changes, and too abrupt changes, within a single lifetime are not good. We lose our way in a world that is always altering; we cannot look ahead if, somehow, we cannot look back. This was the meaning and import of Europe to Americans like us who saw life partly, at least, in terms of thought. We had come to Europe, to the quietest and most tradition-minded place in Europe, and we had settled in a corner of it where every field and grove and hill was sculptured in the long light of the past, only to find this continuity passing and the light rapidly going out.

Decent, thoughtful men, not only in England but all over Europe, looked out at kindly fields and villages stamped with their forefathers' toil and saw the shadow of panic and worse than panic ahead. We, too, had seen it; we, too, had felt it in the days of our quiet living, that ghost without a name, that bell tolling in a soundless, anarchic air. An old order was passing, an old way of life was going, and the war that was coming close, closer every day, was only a symptom of it, not a finality. The old European controls were down, sinking lower and lower as the "white war of nerves" ate into and rotted out the old resistant fiber. In Germany the incarnate ghosts of despondency laid the whips of sadism around the necks and shoulders of a shuddering civilization. In

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England the controls were sinking too, as an old nation tried to preserve and isolate itself, turning its back to avoid those great responsibilities which only a young, energetic nation could face. When shattered nerves could no longer stand it, Europe would collapse into war, almost with relief, with just that gasp and clutch of a man who has hung from a precipice with grass roots in his hand. And in the deeply entangled, intertwined maze of things, no man would see clearly and all men would stare ahead to a future lit by a fitful smear, the reflection of a thousand answerless questions.

All around us in those years of quiet living in that green and tranquil spot, the signposts that pointed the past, out of which the future was determined, were being ripped up. The long passion of Europe was wearing itself out in a silence, a brooding toward the storm. When it came, ripping and dancing over those pleasant fields, its nature would be such that in its aftermath no man would ever find the same signposts again; this time men would not find their way back. And if one man knew it, a thousand men in England knew it deeply in their hearts. The long chain, the golden chain of passions, hours, wars, peace, turmoil, reveries in England and Europe, was broken. Only far away across the seas, a light plucked long ago from the old hearth of Europe might still give hope.

2. **N**O ONE CAN GO TO THE BOTTOM OF the sea and come back again without a picture, however vague, of what the ocean depths are like. Perhaps it is wrong; perhaps there are other pictures. But through all the deepening shades, the apprehensive clouds that lay over England in our time, one picture of England was impressed on us that could not be erased until the new conflict that must change every picture broke out.

It was the picture of a very old world. Not the glamorous old world of the tourist, the tradition-hungry American, but an old world losing its spirit in the slow, organic, shapeless fashion that marks all change in England today or yesterday. It was an old world sterile yet self-sufficient, balanced in a way, adequate in a way, enjoying its precarious poise on the rim of time by gripping hard to its assets of the present and the past. Dominating the picture were the faces of its rulers, the same faces Titian painted in his portraits of the Venetian merchants, men who also knew how to grip hard and to cling. It was that expression, the same hard, alert caution, the same rigid conservatism, the same crafty determination to avoid risks, that gave them the look not of eager merchants confronting a changing world, but of trustees of a world their enterprising forefathers had built.

Behind these central figures in the picture stood the

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larger grouping of England today—a vast, docile mass of people accustomed to leadership, accustomed to doing what they are told. Among them, here and there, were signs of revolutionary restlessness and strains of as vigorous a character as any nation has ever bred, what we are often led to believe is typical English character. Looking closely at the picture as a whole, perhaps the most striking aspect was the smallness of the background behind the portraits and it became obvious at once how inevitably that must alter the focus and the effect.

How small England really is for such a mass of population can best be realized by understanding that she is territorially smaller than Sweden and that she contains 45,000,000 people compared to Sweden's 6,000,000. A long day's drive in a good car will take you from one end of the island to the other and at no point in that drive will you be more than sixty miles from the seacoast. And so it was not difficult to see that so small a place with so dense a population required that that population should live in certain well-defined grooves and not exceed them. It is the general acceptance of this condition, the general knowledge that if he steps too far he knocks his neighbor's wall that has induced the docility and conservatism which color the Englishman's character and which in turn produce a sort of contentment and ease in a life that to most Americans would seem horizonless and without change.

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But on any wide or bird's-eye survey of the land itself, the striking factor was not how crowded the island appeared but how vastly and curiously empty. You may walk for miles over the Yorkshire moors or the hilly stretches of the Border without seeing a house or a sign of human habitation. On your map whole large districts, north, south, east and west, will be marked as uninhabited. If you go by train from Plymouth to London, your journey will be through one vast park, with plowed fields here and there, cattle grazing, glimpses of ancient farms and manor houses set in their perennial frames of unchanging rural loveliness. From all this land the population has been drawn off for centuries to settle in vast, huddled agglomerates. Go farther north along the spine of England, the Pennine range that strings along from the Lakes to the Midlands, perhaps a hundred and fifty miles, and the picture changes, devastatingly, as though some dark earth force had been long at work. You can read the explanation in what lies before you. For as you slip down from the lovely northern moors and vales of which Wordsworth had so much to tell, the picture of another England stretches out, one sprawling Pittsburgh crowded together in the heart of England, its smoke lying for miles like a fog over the wild peaks or the gentle grasslands on either side. From Leeds to Derby you are never away from the beat of the factory hammers, the sound of driving wheels, except in those desolate regions where the factories lie forlorn and broken and the forgot-

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ten men of England cling to the rotten towns and villages that fringe its edge.

Here, then, is the answer, the echo to the huge moors, parks and deserted tracts; it is also the answer to the beautiful Georgian manors set in their eternal loveliness of meadow and wood. All that moves and lives on the brighter surface of England—Mayfair, Piccadilly, Rotten Row, the pink-coated huntsmen in the field, the quiet, drab gentlemen in Parliament, the even fields and gentle downs of Sussex—owes its existence to this. Eighty per cent of the population of England is clustered in towns like these, like Leeds, Manchester, Bradford, under their eternal tall pillars of grime and smoke. Twenty-five per cent of that eighty per cent cling to London and the immense drab vistas of the London suburbs alone.

3. MUCH OF OUR LIFE IN ENGLAND, except for the quiet periods on the Sussex farm, was spent in exploration, for the greatest and most interesting curiosity shop in the world lay at our doorstep. Our minds and eyes itched with exploratory fever and there was no gainsaying it until we had poked into every nook and corner of that island shop. The ways and means of the modern world were on our side, and around and below swift wheels lay a tapestry of never-ending wonder and preoccupation.

In our immediate surroundings the slow ways and manners, the easy, kindly ways of country people were also on our side and once you are anchored in a certain place you identify yourself with it. It was as absorbing as taking off an old skin and putting on a new one and as easy, passing in and out, as though we had been ghosts. The farm people were not afraid to talk to us as they were to the Squire or the Squire's son or the rector's wife or other people above them whose elevation demanded a corresponding elevation of sentiment. Our very impermanence gave us value. We were there, but we were from "over there," and so in a sense only half there; foreigners are not easily earmarked. People who had warned us that you cannot win the trust or affection of rural people in England short of a ten years' stay among them and by

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keeping your own distance were shown to be wrong. In this case the distance was a straight line between two points. We needed a reference point against which to check the wanderings that took us to every corner of England and we had it, not in intercourse with our better-class neighbors, who couldn't swallow our unstandardized opinions, but in a rural intelligence that was as essentially English as the taproot of a Windsor oak. For that matter, if you were a European bent on observing America, you would not go to the State Department in Washington where opinion is colored and confused like a Roxy mural, but to the lobby of Roxy's itself or to an Idaho farm to lean over the fence and chew the cud with the owner. People who work with their hands with soil and animals have a certain sense; it does not mean they are perfectly beatified. Not one of our rural neighbors looked to us other than as he was—often a battered but cheerfully time-defying survival of a tough rural system. But a man who plows a field and feeds his children has to know more than a man who clips his coupons and feeds his children.

We wanted that kind of anchorage because it gave poignancy and strength to our vision, such as it was. Often when we returned from our wanderings on the Continent or from America, we were surprised to walk down that lane, under the shadow of that hill, into that door of ours, and have them all say together, "Yes, you see, this is home." It was not that that kind of thing was

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a signal for sentimental raptures, for daisy plucking along ghost-haunted ways; it was simply that without that feeling of participation, deep and tranquil participation, the scene around us was without meaning and the signposts could not be read. There were the recurrent, extraordinary crises of those years; there was Abyssinia, for example, there was Munich, there was Prague, there was Mussolini's march on Albania, there was the whole political and economic consequence of "peace in our time." People whom we met on visits home in America said we had no business to feel this way or that way about these things, we were not historians or diplomats, we did not know the background, so why did we act so or say so and so about them?

But when you live close to the grass roots, it is the grass you watch. And when the ground beneath the grass shakes, you do not need to be told that what you are feeling is an earthquake.

If, for example, some newspaper editor or embattled congressman rises to tell you that Europe and England today are engaged in a great, grim battle between St. George and the dragon, it may be so, but it is all quite different to the men and women who are still working in the fields and walking down the lane near the old farm in Sussex. They know that wars come as this one came, like an old ache in old bones, foreboding bad times and crop failures. They know that before this came rain, drought, ill seasons when Englishmen looked up to the

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sky of their leadership and hardly knew it for English and may not know it for a long time or ever again. They know that what they have to do they have to do. They do not know what, in the doing of it, may come.

It was not within the purpose of this picture as we saw it in many quiet years (first the frame, the old shrewd faces now a little blank, the greater scene of England stretching under smoke and rolling hill, and the thing that had come over it all, the sense of failure that was a mood before it became a sentiment, and an ache in every mind and limb) to estimate these things or the sum of them as of good or of evil. The human habit of ascribing high motives to sound business transactions was not peculiarly and entirely English. It ran through the world. But once one got beyond the words to the facts, the picture was more fascinating still.

England was England because of a number of things, but mostly because of certain well-known peculiarities of her geography and history, and because certain conditions prevailed in the world around her at the time of her great expansive era. And English character, whether it was the character of the slow, pleasant folk around us or those who guided their destinies for better or for worse, was a product of certain conditions. For English eyes turn in on England, and England thinks of herself not as a European state or part of any geographical grouping or division but as that unique imperial island

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containing a unique race destined to go through the world bringing its culture to any outlandish spot it may arrive at, and remaining completely and unalterably English. In contrast to the carefully fostered Nazi conception of race superiority and racial purity, the Englishman's conception of his own apartness, his own uniqueness, is unconscious, born in every baby in England, running spontaneously through all education so that you find public-school boys solidly grounded in every minor nuance of English history and blandly unaware that a Thirty Years' War was ever fought a few miles across the Channel. To Englishmen the world does not consist of Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas, but of the world and England. The outlook is an autarchy of faith, innate and unshakable and stronger than anything fascism can ever conjure up to further its dubious domestic and foreign policies.

And now that faith was apparently not quite so strong. Clever minds had found weaknesses in the old unassailable armor and shot arrows through it. Englishmen high and low, seeing this, were puzzled. The more sober-minded and thoughtful of them were deeply concerned. The few who had gone out to compare their own island with the world were frankly afraid. To us, listening to the wind and whisper of things near the grass roots of our quiet place, it seemed that their fear was justified. For we could see quite plainly that if England was England by virtue of her position and geography, she was also as she

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was by an act of faith not only of her own inhabitants, but to a large extent of the world. And it was this English faith, implying a certain English spirit, that interested us most, whether we looked abroad on field and cottage or factory or workshop or Houses of Parliament or slum. If it had its warrant, its stamp, its signal, we thought we would see it and hear it, better than anywhere else, at the root of things near us or farther afield. If it did not, then we might also come on the symptoms, and a great deal of English life and a great many English policies would look to us like an effort to keep the appearance of a faith and condition that was no longer conspicuously alive and a force to be reckoned with and counted on by living men, least of all in England itself.

Part II
The Farm in Sussex

4. **A**N AMERICAN IN ENGLAND, IF HE tries to see straightly and truthfully, cannot count on immediate reactions to tell him more than a meager fraction of the story. Simple common sense and a glance at the globe are enough to show him that the fifty-second degree of latitude, which cuts through the middle of the United States just to the north of New York, passes slightly south of Naples. In everything that makes for habits of life, for all those impulses, reactions and resultant ideas and emotions for which climate, sun and temperature are enormously responsible, New York is closer to Rome than to London; and London, saved from freezing by the benevolent and moderating current of the Gulf Stream, which preserves all Europe from the arctic and touches America not at all, is, so to speak, Labrador.

All the swift decisions, the quickening contrasts, the sudden changes that are a necessary part of life under high bright skies, arctic winters and equatorial heat, are mostly outside the range of normal English experience. So is such a geography as ours, whose startling, stupendous range has never before been grappled with by a single unit of the human race. Unless one understands this, one understands exactly nothing; one does not even begin to see how it is that, though a Spaniard may settle

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comfortably in London or a Liverpool man retire to Madeira, few Englishmen are comfortable for long in America and many Americans who stay in England feel from time to time that unless something happens they must go mad.

Climate, geography and a great racial mixture have settled once and for all that the United States and England are at least such different places as, for example, Andalusia and Trinidad. A common language is a tie that confuses as much as it binds; as such, it has frequently been made to serve the worst of all possible purposes. No man's roots are anywhere but in the soil that has borne him, and too far and too long away from that soil he is only a withered limb of himself. That was one truth that we could always come back to on our Sussex farm. Recognized and seen as such, it made a difference. There was nothing to take for granted, nothing at all; least of all insight, least of all perfect sureness in finding our way to the heart of the picture we wished to see, the picture of England today. Because a thing displeased us, what of it? If it pleased a dozen or a hundred or a thousand other people, it had a right to be there. Literally speaking, we had no right to speak out of our own mouths. Only if we could get out of our own skins, into other skins, see how it looked to someone else . . .

A friend of ours, a lady from the village, who came to call at the height of the Munich crisis, wished to God

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she could go away, wished to God she could leave England, now, forever, could not understand how we could go on living there for another single day. A sick dread that could just refrain from moaning aloud had its hold on most people around us in those days, and in the spring that followed that autumn. No one could blame them, least of all ourselves who had a perfectly good place to retire to beyond the reach of any bombing planes so far invented. No one could stand the thought of the shambles that London might become if the Nazi threats were actually carried out. And only a madman would hope to retrieve from the slime and ooze of terror that was turning half the bowels of Europe to water many pearls of truth or wisdom. It was not in fishing in waters like that, waters of sheer madness, that one would feel the bite on the line. For one thing, the terror when it came would never be so bad as it was in anticipation in people's minds. They would have too many other things to do. And then again, it might not come.

It might or it might not. The radio, like the airplane, had turned Frankenstein in the hands of its creators, and out of it had come a new technique—mass terror. The answer to that was a periodic shivering spell, an ague, a twentieth century sort of scientific plague that swept over Europe (and far-off America) from time to time. The masters of the new technique were practiced sadists, and no one who respected the truth could say that their opposing numbers were anything but hollow sounding

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boards. If they had been merely rascals, it would have been better, for then everyone would have understood everyone else and no one would have tried to profit at the expense of decent, innocent peoples and no one would have lost. When one understood clearly that the governing intelligence of England in those days was a puzzled, stubborn cipher (which could later be rolled about, since a cipher has no legs to stand on), plus a set of additional ciphers with good traditional faces and bank references and their satellite editorial writers, confronted by paranoiacs, one had exactly the picture of the depths of degradation to which Europe and the world had sunk in recent years while millions of decent people were as decent as they had always been. A sudden gust might blow the cloud away or the lightning might burst forth. Europe might keep on shivering and cooling down and shivering again, or the whole crazy, rivetless structure built up by Hitler and von Ribbentrop and the British Tories and appeasement might come down; or it might be desperately shored up by emergency measures from the bottom while attempts were made to slip in new bricks. You could have it either way or any way. You could even have it that if you stayed to watch it long enough it might have you.

But this thing was not a picture. Europe gone mad and England gone bad, stricken in its spirit, sick and misled and lost to all its historic duties and the hopes decent

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men from far and wide had pinned on it, was not a picture but only a color. Other nations, including England, had been misled, trapped, betrayed in time past and worked their way out again; America had been misgoverned in part and in whole through most of its history and apparently a large number of Americans still thrived. Could England ever escape again, ever regain her place in the sun?

From the point of view of Oxford or Fleet Street this was one sort of question, but from the point of view of the Sussex farm it was quite different. There, at least, you saw that history, whatever else it is or is not, is composed of a great number of very small things: the butcher's bad meat no less than the shot at Sarajevo; the set of young lips straining to win the mile; the look on a machinist's face when he surveys the work he has done well; the damp and fungus on a cottage wall and the streaming noses and chilblained hands of English children in winter; the rise of the downs and the stones and mounds that are older than the memory of England; the smoke that comes up to meet you and encloses you in a swirling gray inferno when you come down from the hills into the sludge and traffic of Leeds or Sheffield.

5. WE HAD ONLY TO WALK DOWN A Sussex lane or through the village to identify ourselves with the past, and to enjoy that further curious identification of the American mind with the scenes and legends on which it has been nourished in childhood.

For it is easy to see, it is easy to understand, how England has come to play in the American imagination the contrasting roles of fairy godmother and the wolf who almost ate Red Ridinghood, Cinderella's Prince and the wicked stepmother. From the two little princes murdered in the Tower through Robin Hood, Sir Francis Drake to Dombey and Son and not excluding Mrs. Simpson and the Duke of Windsor, runs a whole network of fiction and fantasy that ties the American imagination across the seas, and few things exist for tourist eyes that have not existed for them before in the pages of Shakespeare and Thackeray. And this sort of literary reality has always been a most effective screen, a moving smoke screen blinding American eyes to those realities of English life which, if they wish to cope with them, must sooner or later be understood.

Because we believed that facts and statistics can be twisted to serve almost any man's end, and that the chief and most important thing about a country is the people who live in it, we tried to give facts and statistics their

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due and let England and its people explain themselves. That took a long time, for England is different from most places in the world and of all places in the world today the most different from America, as we have said. Until, to a certain extent, we had become more deeply identified with the place we lived in, it was quite useless for us to talk about it, until the Sussex farm had become "our" house, in the sense of our home, and the Sussex people "our" people, in the sense that being there or going away made a difference to them and to us. We knew this to be true and we also felt it true that if you want to know something about a big thing you had better study a part of it first. There was satisfaction in that for us, for in a sense, and a much greater sense than would be true in any small part of America, the place of field and wood, farm and manor, where we lived was a miniature of England and a world complete in itself. In its laws, manifestations, rules and customs, with their roots running straight back to pre-Tudor times, was not only a breath of the ages but a breathing, living witness of many things that are true of England today. So that if we could show this world as it was, before going farther afield over England, we should have much in our hands to start with.

Perhaps it was only luck, beginners' luck in a new place, that led us to the old estate and the secluded corner of it that became our home in Sussex. We might have gone farther and seen and found less than we were bound

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to see and learn there. For a ripeness and completion, an overripeness and overcompletion, hung everywhere around us in quiet, misty air. It was necessary that this should be so profound, so still, as at first to shock us and make us a little afraid of ourselves and it, or of ourselves for coming to stay in it.

The static quality of that place was so thick, the droop, the burden, the weight of the centuries so apparent, that we had at first the sensation of those explorers who hunting a jungle come on the ruin of a forgotten temple and have to explain to themselves what it means and where the life has gone that set the stones of century-long endurance. We had to work ourselves free of the feeling that its past was too old and strong for us of the present, and in that working come to know and understand what we could of the present and the past. In time it became a sort of intense laboratory for us where, closing ourselves in from everything but England, we could hear the voice of England in every wind-rustle in the field, in the crash of uprooted elms in the park, in the twist of the storm, in every brick and mossy stone.

If it was so with the place, the greater estate, it was equally so with our smaller house after we had set ourselves to scrub out, whitewash and brighten its ancient, cavelike dinginess. It belonged to the great mood, the long reverie that Englishmen like best when they thirst and long for their own countryside and think of home. By not one stick or stone or concession to change and

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time was it other than deeply fixed to the centuries-old pattern of England. And when we looked around us, the same pattern appeared in the estate as a whole, an almost dreaming unreality into which we had to initiate ourselves. Yet behind all this bemusement of the mind that grew from its colors and contours was a life so curious, so remote from our own, so different from that picture-haunted world of the tourist, so deeply significant of what England is and does today, so fixed and grave, even in its colors of an old and fading miniature, that it became the work of many years to know it.

6. THE LANE IN WHICH OUR HOUSE STOOD

led out of the village to plunge between steep green banks cluttered with holly bushes and ivy. Once out of that runnel of shadows and interlaced branches, it forked and led out in smaller lanes all over the farm. It wound past the entrance of the long drive to Clifton Hall, its gatekeeper's lodge gone green with age and moss, the massive oaks rooted in velvet turf kept smooth by sheep. Crossing the brook, the lane came up out of the wood to a level with the fields. The estate opened up before your eyes, the grim façade of the manor on the right, three crazy-roofed cottages on the left, with our own faded-red lump of a house snugly laid in a fold of the land over toward the large copse where the pheasants bred, while ahead rose the downs, the smooth, green, wall-like frame to the picture, edging and encompassing the whole estate in high, fluid lines. Here were the limits of a world complete in itself and self-sufficient.

It had been one of the most prosperous agricultural properties in the South, never a large estate, as estates go, running to about fifteen hundred acres of meadow, wood, arable field and downland, but the soil, though so heavy that it took three large horses to drag the plow over it in spring, was good. And that soil, which had once, long before the day and time of which we are writing, sup-

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ported a manor, a squire with his stables and hounds, three farmers and their families, a dozen cottagers and their children, now supported only a decent, hard-bargaining local man in his suburban villa with gargoyles, his wife who resembled the gargoyles, his two cars, and a half dozen hard-working, aging laborers right out of the old, fading book of rural England.

As he had no interest or heart in the place, as a non-resident tenant, beyond what he could get out of it, this farmer was putting nothing back into it. The men who worked for him—cheerfully on the whole, for he was a fair master—complained that he was starving the soil, that it was getting too thin for good crops. The house which we ourselves occupied, with its fringe of orchard, its old walls and stone barns, was the house he should have lived in had he been much concerned or very active on the spot. The great house, Clifton Hall, as the seat of final authority, would thus have sat in something like condescending judgment on him and his ways. It had actually done so as recently as the day of the “Old Squire,” of revered memory among the cottagers, who just after the last war had handed over the reins to his son to avoid death duties and retired to die in a Victorian villa on the coast. It was no longer thus under the present easygoing Squire and his son, who had their heads full of other things. Everything, including barns, fences and walls and our own house, which we were continually cementing together and patching, was going into a state

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of mossy and picturesque ruin. Clifton Hall itself had one sound wing, the Georgian one where the family lived. The rest was inhabited by bats and mice, who got wet when it rained, and by slum children from London at the time of the great evacuation.

The rather advanced state of collapse did not alter the charm of the place. The iron rails of the park fence might be down in places or tied together with string and wire. The wooden fences were rotted, the cottage roofs sagged brokenly against the hills beyond. The cottages were in as bad a state as Clifton Hall itself. There was a great dearth of money; taxes were too high. There was only enough cash, really, to keep things glued and strung together. The farmer was not supposed to keep the buildings in repair; that was the function of the estate.

The estate had two supervisors, a professional agent who lived some twenty miles away and was responsible for everything, and William Clifton, the present son and heir to the whole, who was supposed to be the immediate inspector on the spot. Since this was his sole occupation in life, one might have expected better things, except that he had no money, varying ambitions, and only that margin of wit that a public-school education and a brief army career had not knocked out of him. He was a medium-sized, youngish man with an abrupt stare, a pleasant enough smile, and a face that varied in expression between a fist and an open palm. Neither of the two expressions, as we learned from our cottage neigh-

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bors, was very trustworthy. He usually appeared in the fields on his' tours of inspection in rubber boots, a well-worn beret, and trailing a small, twisted, ugly Border terrier. The cottagers resented these tours because, as they said, he poked into everything, promised everything, and did nothing. Some of the cottages leaked, some had water on their kitchen floors all winter, some had holes through which the wind blew so hard that you could not keep a candle alight until the new housing laws came into effect and the local authorities took a hand in things, and one and all shook in the winter gales in rather terrifying fashion. But since Clifton Hall itself leaked and probably also shook in the gales, the inspection tours came to nothing. They were flourishes, we presumed, of the old feudal spirit. They were conducive to nothing but a certain sourness on the part of those who slept under the cottage holes and waded through the cottage kitchens, mingled at times with a certain wry humor.

Sir John Clifton, the "Young Squire," as he was called in deference to his father of respected memory, we saw only once or twice during our whole stay on the Sussex farm. He was a short, bottle-nosed, heavy-set man, supposed to be possessed of a sense of humor, and generally popular. Lady Clifton appeared only once on the horizon at a garden party at the Hall, a remarkable affair to which the whole village was invited, and where the various groups in the village hierarchy kept strictly to themselves, butcher with butcher, banker with banker, ironmonger

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with ironmonger, and so on right up to the "County" who surrounded Lady Clifton in the dominating group—an altogether weird and terrifying assortment, some of them in picture hats with feather boas right down to the ankles. Amid this group Lady Clifton stood, a rather awkward, tall, thin, frightened, elderly lady, looking as though she were not sure whether she had been invited or not. She had a reputation in the village for being mild and kind.

The life of the farm was usually interesting. The laborers, whether you talked to them or merely watched them, were one and all products of an older rural way of things that was rapidly fading out. They had about them an air that the shabbiness of their clothes could never disguise, the air of free men doing work they liked and free because of their liking for it. Also because of their skill in it. Roberts, the shepherd, a stout ball of a man with round cheeks, deep sly eyes and a mustache that looked as though his own little white terrier had worried it, was the best thatcher of hayricks in the county. Seeing him at work high up on the slippery slope of a monumental haystack, laying the layers in solidly with a twist of his fork as they were shot up from the carts, then a day or two later on his hands and knees plaiting and weaving the straw, was always a wonderful sight. Flowers, which most of the laborers spent little time on, were a great passion with Roberts; the dahlias in his garden grew shoulder-

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high in autumn and he spared himself something to buy new bulbs. In spring he was the first to bring news of the "primmyroses" that grew beside the brook, pausing on his way home to report them at our gate, holding a yellow bunch in one hand and in the other a couple of dead rats clutched by their tails, rats that his little white dog had killed in the haystack and that he was bringing home for dinner for his ferrets. He was an interesting little man with great proficiency in his short stubby fingers, and a stubborn, cheerful, kindly way that he wore winter and summer, good weather and bad, like a feather in his hat.

Barker, the carter and plowman, was another fine man. He was lean and tall and often a little yellowish from overwork and days in the wet fields and nights in the small, damp cottage where he lived with his wife, son, son-in-law, daughter and two children, all in five small, dark rooms. His face was drawn thin, a fine face like a noble profile on a coin, except that his teeth were stumpy and broken, as were most of the teeth in the rural parts around us. Like all the men on the farm, he was happy as long as he had his health and his work; like most of them, he had no grudges or grievances and no enemies, except once in a while the wind or the weather or a sense of advancing age.

He and Roberts were the ones we saw most often, because the stable where he kept his carts and plow horses looked over our garden wall, but there was also

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old Evans, the field hand, who lived in a red-tiled cottage in a hollow of the hills behind us, who had survived three attacks of winter pneumonia and still did a full day's work, though feebly, at seventy-eight, and whose bright red, square-cut face and deep blue eyes looked like one of those faces that peasants carve out of hickory wood in certain parts of Europe and then brightly color.

These were some of the men who, with their easy voices and slow, gentle ways, gave the farm its air of special life in a world specially set apart with its cottages and manor and lanes, bounded by the steep green rise of the downs and the copses that in winter were full of blue and violet mists. But of all the men who worked the fields around us for the farmer, John Graw had the most to tell to help bring our picture of England to light in the natural way we sought. He was a tall man with huge hands and feet, the neck and shoulders of a bull, red hair, and a face that had been so badly shattered in the last war that only one side of it was a face at all. The other was a raw, red, twitching mask. At first when we met him, this mask side shocked us, so that it was difficult to talk to him and appear not to notice. Gradually we got used to it and learned to see only the one good side of his face as the whole expression of the man.

Coming from solid, lower middle-class people, John Graw had had no more than the ordinary in the way of education, but beyond this he had educated himself. He

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was a remarkable example of the superiority, in England, of a man with a native intelligence over those men who pass through public schools and universities to high government posts, who dominate British diplomacy at home and abroad, whose thinking is done for them from the cradle, whose leadership has brought England to its present state of political dilapidation, and whose opinions are daily prepared for them in the *London Times*. Left to follow his natural destiny, John Graw would probably have gone from school at an early age into some bank or insurance office. The war that had shattered his face had also smashed this hope for whatever it was worth. You could not carry that face daily up to the city and back amid strangers; you had to find a place, a niche, for a life smashed like his. So he had come to the Sussex farm and become a cattleman. Neither the cattle nor the cottagers, after they had become familiar with him, were likely to stare. In that way he had escaped becoming a clerk and had become instead a man.

And John Graw was a superior man, superior in intelligence to almost anyone we had met in any circle around us in Sussex, too superior to disfigure his tragedy with self-pity or bitterness, and there was a good deal of genuine nobility that came out in his attitude toward small things and large things, even to his work.

"I don't understand," he would say gently. "People, even people hereabout, look down on the farm laborer as the lowest form of human creation. It seems to me

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stupid. It seems to me to be a lack. The care of soil and animals requires more intelligence than half the occupations in the world today. Why is it that a man sitting on a high stool totting up figures in a bank looks down his nose at the man who feeds him?"

Although John Graw worked from five in the morning until dark in winter, and in summer during haymaking from five until after nine at night, he was an omnivorous reader. His knowledge of farming conditions in all parts of the world was almost inexhaustible and he was constantly studying methods of soil and cattle improvement. His knowledge of politics, economics, and foreign affairs was the result of wide and careful reading and gave his thoughts a balance, a free play, and a lucidity which were utterly lacking in the strangled utterances of the middle-class people around us. His one affliction, if he complained of it, lay not in the disfiguring blow the world had given him, but in the placid, bovine lives around him that gave his thoughts on life, and his studies, no room for expansion.

"I sometimes wonder what I'm doing alone with my thoughts," he would say. "Perhaps it's wrong for a chap in this kind of work to think. But I have to think. Mostly it's not because I want to; it's because I can't help it."

For all that, his thoughts had the kind of ripeness that comes from a slow flowering, and coming that way, they often seemed to us the intelligent flashes from that mist

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that a slow rural life and its animals, crops and people build up around thought. Others had thoughts, an urgent sense of the perils around them at a time of loss and decay in England, but they could not express them. With him the power of expression was inborn, and whenever we listened to him we knew that we were not listening to him alone. That was, perhaps, because the world had become divided in his mind, not between "me and the world" but between "us and them," between the sort of men who did the work of the world and the sort who kept to a world divided off from them where they became shadow figures not to be trusted.

"A man can't look up in England any more," he would say, until the war broke out. "If he does he gets so ashamed of himself he has to look down."

The drift of English policy all during the Spanish War, and through the Munich crisis, was a bitterly painful subject to him, leaving a scar that was still fresh on his mind in the autumn of 1939: "I don't see who there is to trust us. We've lost the goodwill of everyone who might have trusted us." Then with a flash of resentment: "Those who have done this dirt ought to have their noses rubbed in it. They've helped Hitler to help himself. And what do they really want? Do they care about England? I can't think they do. They care about themselves, about their bank stocks and money and living as they've always lived. They're afraid of anything that threatens their com-

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fort. And they've got the money and the power, and so they always have had and always will."

Old Grimshaw, in whose cottage John Graw had been a lodger for twelve years, we saw much of, especially after an accident during the late summer of 1938 when things went badly for him. He was not really old, a man in the early fifties, which on the farm was a man in his early prime. Roberts was "gone sixty-four winters" at least and was still as active and bouncing as a youth of sixteen. The sound of the hunting horn would always tear him from his garden or from his work on the fences to pound down the lanes at a lively trot, his dog, Toby, trotting behind with the air of an old dog who knows some better tricks. The sound of the horn was to Roberts what whisky is to a confirmed drinker. On hunt days it was useless to expect work from Roberts. The instinct of the chase was powerful in him; at those times his close resemblance to a lively root vegetable grown from the Sussex soil would cease and he would resemble an old and indefatigable hound with the fox's cunning up his sleeve.

Barker, as far as the farm was concerned, was a boy in his teens at forty-six; and old Atkins at seventy-eight had gone back to work after pleurisy with a look of deep beatitude on his square, long-chinned face like a sun in a benevolent sky. So that to call Grimshaw old was a way of speaking only, an indication of helplessness or

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infirmity reserved on the farm for the weaker sorts of familiar things. Thus Martin, our cook, might recount to us some especially bright or promising achievement of "Old Tom" or "Old Bob," his sons aged seven and eleven respectively.

Grimshaw was a tall, slow, ruddy man, shaped somewhat like a wedge, broad at the base with powerful arms and hands, a thin, narrow head and a narrow, handsome, trusting face. Like a great many simple and primitive creatures who have not much in common with their fellows, except under the strain of work and emergency, his devotions were purely and entirely reserved for his master. The twist that the inherited feudal way of life in rural England has left on the soil and those who work it had essential expression in Grimshaw, the foreman. He would have died for his master where he would have only grinned and shaken his head at some misfortune to Roberts or Barker, his neighbors for a score of years. In everything but this devotion he was a silent man, somewhat hard and overstrained though never ill-natured, and gentle in his ways. And this virtue in its singular purity gave him an awkward grace that seemed at times not quite human, but like the grace of an ancient and trustworthy dog.

It was through him, as time went on, and from his large, placid wife that we were enabled to look through the mist and ruin of the present to a livelier, more flourishing background at Clifton. Of all those around us

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who belonged to the past or might have stepped out of it, he was peculiarly the pawn of the past. Whether it was because he dreamed more, or slept less in the present, we could not tell. But what he told us was deeply interesting and added detail to our picture and color and more depth than we should have been able to see without him.

7. **B**ECAUSE COUNTRY PEOPLE LIVE slower lives and therefore have longer memories, and because Clifton itself was once a famous estate and even in its slow ruin was still mossy and odoriferous of livelier days and better things, the place where we lived, at the heart of it all, often served us as a clear sort of mirror of the rural past and present of England. With people as uncomplex and straightforward as Grimshaw and his wife, or old Roberts or Atkins for that matter, the past was always close. Their lives, in the sense that they had always occupied the same place and done the same work and expected to continue doing it, were almost literally futureless. There was no thought of tomorrow, but only of today and yesterday. And in these rural people's reckonings the one rose up like the prophet's rod to swallow the other.

We could not re-create the past of Clifton, of a semi-feudal landed property with its great hall, its houses scattered through the village, its little picturesque and half-ruined cottages, for we had never seen that past, but such fragments as were offered to us we could turn slowly in our minds and consider whether the color we saw, and the brightness, now tarnished, justified their outspoken reveries about the "good old days." Mrs. Grimshaw was one of the more open and constant worshipers

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at this strange but quite human altar. Her days of glory were perhaps more vivid than most, for had she not played as a child forty years ago with the Old Squire's daughters up and down the long, dark, echoing halls and corridors of Clifton? One could see her even now, even as she recalled those days stooping over the mixing bowl in her low-ceilinged cottage kitchen, with the door open on the sun and the flowers outside—one could see in that stout, placid, elderly countenance the face of the child she had been. For the memory of it burned like a candle behind thin parchment and she could remember how ashamed she had been because they wore slippers that made them seem to fly along the corridors while she had only her thick, high, clumsy boots.

Once or twice each summer, the "ladies," now grown gray as herself, still rode over the downs from their present home to see her, and on these days she was a child again and the only pain was the memory of their slippers and her boots. These scattered visits were, in a sort of way, her life line, for out of them she received her sense of life, that is, of the past. They were also like torches delivered into her hands with which to drive out the eyes of the present and the future, hard eyes that she could not look into without flinching or growing hard herself. All her vindictiveness and her scorn were saved for the ways of people nowadays. and these memories nerved her for a greater scorn.

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There was both strength and weakness in this attitude, and the strength we saw first and the weakness only came to trouble us later in our considerations and experiences of England. For that kind of solidarity with the past which was Mrs. Grimshaw's chief attribute, and that upward glance toward master as the source and sun of everything, was typical of much we saw in England. It was the loyalty between master and man, the old feudal loyalty that still exists in the rural regions where the great landed estates have not been broken up; it was, to return to a description we have used before, a relationship like that between a good dog and a decent man. That loyalty, working vertically up and down, precluded among the farm laborers themselves any deeper sense of solidarity than a casual neighborliness. People who had lived side by side under the same roof or in adjoining cottages for thirty years, and hoed gardens separated by nothing but a low hedge, still did not understand each other and kept their deeper communications to themselves or, if they were men, to favorite drinking chums from other parts of the farm or village at the pub. Loyalty to a class, a party, a principle, was quite beyond them; what concerned them was loyalty to a man.

It was hard not to respect this quality; at the same time it was impossible not to see in it a whole characteristic of England and to ask what it meant for the future of a system now aging rapidly and what sort of men they

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had been who had passed this tradition on, especially in the past. If Mrs. Grimshaw was right, then the perfect identification of interests of man and master at Clifton, which was a perfect example in its way, had made for happiness. But it was also possible that Mrs. Grimshaw's dislike and suspicion of the present and Grimshaw's silent acquiescence in a futureless world were both phases of a dream. As there had been a dream time in the past, so there was a dream master. He was the Old Squire, whose square face framed in its trim Vandyke, and shaded by a bowler hat, rose above the faces of his two daughters, "the ladies," in hunting costume and mounted, in the picture which hung on the most conspicuous part of the wall in the room where the Grimshaws slept.

And the attributes of the Old Squire that fell from Grimshaw's lips, the memories he had of him as a lad before going to serve the man who now rented and ruled over the Clifton farm land, were so almost exactly the attributes of a great tribal deity that one understood at once that the quality of service paid by the Grimshaws to the past was one of worship. To us, with his grave lips and still, carved face, mounted on his powerful hunter, the Old Squire in the picture looked rather like an Old Testament deity, but that was because our imaginations were freer and unconcerned with the actualities. In Grimshaw's reckonings, his attributes were typical godlike ones, chiefly great sternness; just as in Mrs. Grimshaw's

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eyes the attributes of his daughters were great grace and lightness compared with her own clumsy, earthbound boots as against their flying feet in delicate slippers. Also like the Old Testament gods, he had "great rages." These were chiefly directed against poachers and farmers who shot foxes, for he was a hunting deity and never off his horse during the winter. He would, so Grimshaw told us contentedly, "turn a farmer who shot a fox off his land before he ate his breakfast," even though that farmer had lost all his poultry and half his lambs the night before. He kept all the roads of the estate like billiard tables, and one famous drive that ran through woods and copses and circled the beech grove under the downs was so solidly carpeted with moss that the sound of a horse's hoof couldn't be heard. It "looked like a green carpet unrolled through the trees." And winter and summer, so Grimshaw said, men were kept at work sweeping it so that no dead leaves or twigs gathered to spoil the surface.

The Old Squire would have had apoplexy if he were alive today to see how things are done now on the estate—gates rotting and hanging off their hinges, fences collapsing, roofs falling in. So strong a part was he of the England that had been, the England mirrored in the decaying Clifton groves and acres, the England that had done its work at home and still had energy to overrun a quarter of the world, that he could not have faced

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it. He was gone and those who remained, living in the great twilight of his tradition, were only ghosts of him, slack ghosts, in a world that as we looked at it here at Clifton, or farther afield in England, month after month, year after year, seemed to be losing its grip.

8. **I**N THESE WAYS, THE SUSSEX FARM AND the life of the Sussex farm had become for us a textbook in the study of contemporary England. In its life, and in the life of the village as well, we would often come on individualism, the old individualism of rural England carried to its exhaustive peak. Such institutions as were popularly accepted and hoped to be continued depended on individuals like the long-dead Old Squire. You could see their crumbling in the Young Squire and the rather careless overseership he exercised over his estate and acreage. Generally popular as he was, his virtues had a negative tinge. He was not like his father, stern and just and scrupulous; instead, he was simply not unjust and not unscrupulous. His attitude toward Clifton in its state of advancing ruin came down to a question of money.

The Young Squire speculated a good deal, and generally at a loss. A long period as governor of one of England's outlying crown colonies had developed in him a taste for the larger world and for roving over it and trying his hand with gold-mining companies here and there. His hold on the village and the people was as loose as his hold on the estate. As the local justice of the peace the Old Squire had been a terror to every wrongdoer and particularly every poacher in the district. His son practiced the more relaxed code of the day and of the often

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absentee landlord. That was perhaps as it should be, since it is hardly likely that the times would stand for the Old Squire's highhandedness. The general attitude toward the present Squire was in a way the mark of his own easygoing good nature.

The old rural instinct for "looking up to master" found in him more shadow than substance, but it was still necessary that he should occupy a niche apart. After the war of 1914-1918, the instinct for camaraderie and easy fellowship that had been one result of life in the trenches, had found expression in the village in a "Toc H" club. The idea was, of course, that men who worked at the front almost as equals should carry this spirit into civilian life and meet once a week in an atmosphere of perfect fraternity. But the natural gravitation of life back into its old rut was too much; the first man who sauntered into the club and tried to address the Squire as "John" found that the words stuck in his throat. They were jammed there not by any act of will but by the suddenly felt reflex of all the rural generations. John became Sir John after the first meeting, and the farm and rural community sighed with relief. It had been a dreadful moment, almost a revolutionary moment, but by popular consent master was restored again, high in his heaven, just in time. Time that might work ruin, time that had caused so many things to fall to pieces since the Old Squire's day, must not be allowed to go too far.

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We had found that that stubborn opposition to change was one of the outstanding curiosities of contemporary England, a great root cause of the muddle that every now and then reveals itself to the observer and, so doing, illuminates scenes and institutions in veiled and gentle decay. On the Sussex farm it wore its most long-enduring and passive face. As long as a man had his work and someone to look up to, he was all right, or almost all right. No one had the least enthusiasm for changing institutions that were now, along with the estate, manor and cottages, drifting toward ruin. No one had the least belief that the "good old days" would ever be revived. But for every protestant, like John Graw with his red hair, bull neck and glowing temper, there were a dozen conformists in the village and on the farm. And even with Graw protest seldom took the form of resentment against the system as a whole but only against local injustices within the system as it was.

At times it seemed to us that the strange, mute, dog-like devotion of the rural people around us to the principle of "master comes first" and "master knows best" was as dangerous as well as a good instinct, for it left much to the imagination and opened many questions. The old system had crumbled with the old generation, and they were without the strength, will or desire, much less the knowledge, to change anything for themselves. England that had never been a democracy was now a sinking plutocracy without competent leadership, and the best sort

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of people in England, the finer, more instinctive sort of cottage, farm and workshop, simply did not know how to shift for themselves or move the cards stacked against them by the old proprietary hands. The protesters among them were still unable to imagine anything better or anything that might take the place of a way that had gone. We had seen Barker, the plowman, stirred to anger only once, and though that anger was great and had resulted in a good many things being smashed at the pub on Saturday night, it concerned a case of simple individual wrong done by his son's employer who had paid the boy less than the standard rate of wages over a three-year period. But having won his point and delivered himself of a stinging tongue-lashing, Barker was back at work next day as placid and concentrated as ever on the thing in hand.

The system they had no part in and had not created still held them fast. If there was any real hope, it was that it might continue at least a while longer. If there was any vision, it only gazed long and anxiously toward the past. But there was no stir of convincing newborn life. Life ran in its old grooves, and looking at this and other things in England, one was reduced to helpless speculation as to what life would be like when once those grooves were broken.

The village, like the farm, framed a picture of many things that are true of contemporary England. It was not

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a typical village, or even an altogether rural one. Lying about forty miles south of London, near one of the main south-coast roads, it had the growing suburban flavor of most places within commuting distance of the city since the great building boom of the early thirties. It lacked the mossy and earthbound picturesqueness of those villages and market towns of the North which have remained surprisingly unaltered through the centuries. Its note was residential rather than rustic; it had none of the completeness of West Country villages as innocent of gas, electricity, or running water as they were in the Middle Ages and on which the years seem to lie like thick thatch on a roof.

The village was proud, in a way, of its progressiveness, which was that of a prim, pleasant, middle-class woman out on a shopping tour. Its politics, like its small, trimmed lawns and yew hedges, were conservative. It prided itself on its purse and its leisure, and a certain number of its inhabitants went in for "higher things" and kept, along with a butler or a French cook, an atmosphere of the arts. This atmosphere, being purely artificial and outside their scope, was perhaps a little deadly. There was a look of wax flowers about it, but it was enthusiastically nursed in the better drawing rooms.

A rather narcotic smell, like that of snuff, clung to the façades of a good many of the finer village houses. It had to do, not with the portieres or the needlework cushions, but with the faces that went in and out the

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front doors. The peculiar sterility of English middle-class life, and much of its upper-class life in the twentieth century, looked out of many windows and many faces on the secure upper level. Dry rot lay close to the roots of the upper social life. A good place to watch it was in the village church on Sunday; and a good place to see it written was on the large, flabby, untrustworthy face of the rector who occupied the post of rural dean. A sullen, obstinate look hung about most faces in church on Sunday. It was the right thing to do and they were bound to do it. It made us feel that religion in England was a purely conventional affair, like five-o'clock tea, and that the Church, as a whole, was a depressed area like some of the great, sprawling valleys in the Midlands and Wales.

Probably a good deal of this frigid conformity to convention resulted from the fact that so many of the better-class people in the neighborhood were retired doctors, colonels and professional people who had lived side by side for only five or six years and were therefore strangers to each other. It always made us thoughtful, walking down the lane, to be met by the same abrupt, trenchant stare of the erect, fiercely whiskered, retired public-school master which never changed once in the whole time we were there. It was a gaze that swept the skies and reduced everything beneath them to microscopic dust. It was the look that well-bred people in England exchange across their garden walls, that reduces con-

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versation in public places to the subdued twitterings of uncomfortable sparrows and that gives rise to a great many nervous eccentricities which in more genial climates would be accounted simple bad manners.

But beneath this top layer of gaucherie, religion and sterility, there was still a remaining warm stir of life which had very little to do with the youth of the community and a great deal to do with the older, solider generation of tradesmen. The youth, as distinct from the infant life, seemed to us particularly weedy, undeveloped, and forlorn, existing on such vicarious excitements as the cinema and the pub, and content with itself if it could stand in a doorway and sneer down an undeveloped mustache at all who came and went in the High Street. The youth of the village seemed to us only to make itself manifest, as it did through most of our stay in England, through its vacuous gaze into a crystal sphere containing exactly nothing. But about the older shops there clung an air of sturdy cheerfulness that was pleasant and admirable.

Thus it was impossible and illogical to enter the shop of Mr. Jenners, the ironmonger, and not make friends. There was a friendly atmosphere in the proximity of Mr. Jenners and Mr. Flack, his assistant. Mr. Jenners and Mr. Flack moved easily and quietly in just such surroundings as had given our childhoods some of their pleasantest moments and inspirations. When you opened the shop

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door, a small bell tinkled and you found yourself in a long, narrow, dark cavern filled from top to bottom with bright, sharp-featured things like saws and chisels and with mild, gentle-faced things like buckets and stoves and pots and irons and paint in tins. The air always held a faint, fresh odor of tar and turpentine and oil. There was little light in the place except for a few dim lamps, and almost everything was not where it should have been and had to be fumbled for, providing spacious interludes for conversation. There was about Mr. Jenners that air of bustle and alertness which deceived no one, not even himself. He was of the same height as Mr. Flack but thinner and more worried and lacking altogether in the slow, sedate majesty of Mr. Flack's movements and utterances. Together they made a pair like a frantic but not unfriendly terrier and a seal.

Considering that Mr. Jenners was the master and Mr. Flack his assistant in the altogether admirable profession of ironmongery, they were an almost perfect team. What Mr. Jenners lost, and this was usually a good deal, Mr. Flack in his calm way found. They were both devoted to their calling but in a different degree. Mr. Jenners was the creative member and Mr. Flack the passive component. Mr. Jenners was also an artist and an exceedingly capable one. At the age of sixty his iron gates, his and-irons, his door knockers and grates still took prizes regularly at the county handicraft exhibitions. They were the beautiful, thought-out and detailed products of an alert

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and energetic mind. Like many artists, he never had any conception of the value of his work or of the time, thought and industry he put into it and was always getting less for it than it cost him to make. Without Mr. Flack to add the accounts, he would have been in a poor way financially, for his bills and his wits were scattered and this also was appropriate. An artist should be unhampered and have the run of his shop, and besides, the shop had that air of complete self-possession that made you feel that alone, even without Mr. Jenners and Mr. Flack, it would have taken care of itself.

A small, pale, thin boy with a long blond head shaped like the blade of a saw wandered in and out among the pails and barrels and disappeared into the cellar and appeared again; he was supposed to deliver things. What things he delivered we never knew, for it was not that kind of shop. But it was nevertheless a delightful place. Everything in it, including its occupants, had a strong, reminiscent flavor that did the heart good. People came there just as they had come to country stores in our childhood and long before that in our grandmothers' time. What is more, they came on exactly the same errands. They came for paraffin lamps and lamp chimneys, they came for wicks and candlesticks; they came for gas fixtures and gas mantles; they came for oil stoves, poker, andirons and grates. They came and they studied the things they bought and they talked a great deal about

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them and lingered long even after they had bought what they wanted.

Most of the authentic life of the village ran through such solid but old arteries as this. No one looked ahead, or indeed cared to look if they could avoid it. The substance of the thing wished for or dreamed of lay behind, and as on the farm, it was often a worthy substance. You could not see or even remember the red moon-face of Mr. Flack and the worried terrier face of Mr. Jenners without a kind of clutch at the heart for just the sort of goodness and simplicity they represented and which is rare in the world. The same thing that kept us secure with a sense of well-being among people like John Graw, Barker, Grimshaw, Roberts and old Atkins on the farm applied to them and to a few others of the shopkeeping people. There were, for example, the placid, gentle, intelligent woman who ran the tobacco shop and her diminutive husband who delivered the newspapers. In that village street we always knew where we could find relief from the sly, suspicious gleam in the eyes of the postmistress, who bridled away from our strange accent as though we had dropped a toad on the counter, and from the black little postmaster with his bulldog grin, who measured out a small amount of grudging courtesy according to the political situation or the weather. With people like them, it was impossible to tell whether they actively resented you or passively disliked you.

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With Mr. Jarley, the hackney coachman, it was again different. After two years of polite cracking of the ice, Mr. Jarley's wife, with her one blind eye, her truly immense front, her orange-dyed hair, began to open up to us like a fountain that has suffered from a drought. Up to that time Mr. Jarley had not felt entirely sure of us, but once the dangerous corner was turned we knew where we were with them both, as we did with the chimney sweep, Rand, and his wife, who had been forced back to Sussex after twenty years on their own farm in Canada and who hated the narrow, rutted, suspicious ways of the village with a kind of broad-minded, jolly hate. With the Rands, as with John Graw on the farm, we were at ease and could talk and listen as people talk and listen who have been civilized by experience beyond that terrible timorousness, that self-consciousness and morbid rigidity that overcomes English middle-class people confronted by something they cannot immediately identify.

It made us conclude at times that a great deal of the real intelligence, creativeness and honest goodwill in England (as far as the stranger can approach or observe these things) seemed to have settled down to a layer on the bottom of a rigidly stratified society, or to the layer just above the bottom.

Man for man and woman for woman, there was nothing to compare such individuals as John Graw, Jenners, Rand, and the large ladies Mrs. Jarley and Mrs. Rand on

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the score of simple intelligence and tolerance with the individuals of the higher classes whom we met and got to know more than passingly in the village. A fear, amounting almost to a phobia, of the new or unfamiliar, a steady, intense narrowness, an ability to see the thing wished for and nothing else, gave most of the better-born and educated people with whom we came in contact their air of specious self-confidence until the war shook confidence everywhere.

Such experiences as we had of the drawing rooms of the better-class homes in our neighborhood led invariably along the same track to an ultimate feeling of revulsion. An awkwardness, amounting in educated people to uncouthness, presided over most functions. It might dissolve slightly with the sherry and cocktails, only to grow again during dinner. These people, who had occupied the large houses in the neighborhood for years, still seemed to have nothing in common and no ideas to give conversation anything but a feeble, icy flow. An observation not utterly commonplace at one of their dinner parties fell with all the shattering effects of a ten-pound weight on a glass counter. Before you knew what had happened you were pulling the splinters out of your hair while the guests blushed and averted their faces to the soup. Thinking, other than to yourself, was bad form, you were led to suppose. The best people here did not think, and thought less, obviously, the blacker and more perilous the waters around their island grew. The things

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that were good form—attendance at the Glyndebourne Opera, the ballet, a kind of queasy excitement over music and the tame little comedies of the West End theater, golf, the Wimbledon tennis, the quaint peasant customs of the Tyrol, the Scottish moors, were dragged out from their mental drawers and pocketbooks after coffee and given that kind of airing that an infant in a pram gives a rattle.

To say that the social life of our village was not brilliant is not enough; it burned like an eggshell at the bottom of a coffee pot.

But odd and amusing as it could be, it filled us at times with a sort of horror, for these were the substantial, solid people, not too highly placed or too lowly, the people who were supposed to be the backbone and sinew of England, the sort who "traveled" for amusement and culture, who left their imprint on everything including politics and government, to whom the queer mouthy editorials in the *Times* were addressed, who filled comfortable paunches with red sides of beef on Sunday, who occupied pews at church and came away with a look of vacant holiness, who arranged bazaars and fairs and, as far as they could or dared, ruled over the destinies of men like Jenners, Grimshaw, Roberts and Barker and told them how to cast their ballots on election days. They were not active sinners and they were not vicious; they were simply ciphers filled with a wind that other minds had pumped into them, and not wholly alive. Individu-

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ally, and outside the sterilizing influences of their group, caught off their guard, as it were, some of them showed an unexpected warmheartedness. But grown up in a system that had never had the curiosity or the desire or the foresight to compare itself with any other culture or system, they were badly ingrown. Most middle-class and upper-class people in England are. Transported more than fifty miles from their own hearths, they began to dream of and long for home. The certitude of superiority with which every English child is blessed at the christening font, and which most Englishmen lack the imagination to outgrow, blinded them one and all to any one of a hundred things they did not want to see, things that were changing the face of Europe and the world around them and confronting them with an ever-growing menace. That strange wall-eyed look, that molelike stare which the foreigner comes in the course of years to associate with many English lives and their derivative phenomena, was the expression most common to any one of them in the days of which we are writing.

9. **I**N THE VILLAGE AND ON THE FARM there were still vestiges of the old rural handicraft tradition of England. Men like Barker, who had won the plowing prize eight successive times at the local autumn competitions, like Roberts, who was the best and fastest thatcher in the eastern half of the county, like old Atkins, who in his time had been the quickest hedger in the district, represented well a rural profession that was in the truest sense a calling, demanding always the best in a man, apart from any consideration of money or other reward, and never satisfied with anything short of that. A deep poise and self-respect, a quiet independence, a really genial outlook on man and nature were the marks such an attitude set on character. Those people around us who had their hands and hearts in the soil, in plant raising and nursery gardening, in sheep and cattle raising, seemed to share in this outlook and in the character it produced. The earth, the beasts, the trees and crops that nourished them demanded the best of each; very often the sky, the fields, the woods and downs and the things that grew on them or moved across them formed the only book they had ever read. Often, we saw, that book was alive with meanings and references which more literate and ignorant and polished kinds of people could never read. Old Grimshaw, the foreman, could "smell the weather" before it broke or changed. The color and

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abundance of the holly berries in autumn were sufficient evidence for Barker to foretell what the winter would be like. Before the lambs were three weeks old they, like their mothers, had learned to respond to Roberts's shrill whistle and would stream across the fields to the gate of the fold without benefit of crook or dog. All the expressions, shades, meanings, varieties of the seasons were quickly seized on and interpreted by those around us. The prospects of the "primmyroses" and cowslips were as important as those of the mushrooms under the hedge-rows. Old Granfer Heston, whom we thought to have given his last ride when we took him to his gas-mask fitting in September, 1938, emerged in the spring of 1939 to celebrate his ninety-fifth birthday with a walk down the lane and a cross-grained argument with his stout, toothless daughter about the frost and the potatoes.

From all that touched their lives, these men were absolved by the deep peace that rose to meet them from the soil; the things they planted grew into their own roots and bore up their own foliage. They were unlike the peasants in other European lands that we had seen or read about who drove and overworked their small acres with no more thought or love of them than the thought of their gain. They were among the few remnants of an aristocracy, a real aristocracy, that we saw or heard during our time in England, men fitted, selected, shaped and adapted by life to exactly the role they had to play in it, and they came, like the few artisans in the village, straight

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down from the older tradition of England. To have created men like them was, within its limits, an extraordinary achievement, just as the continuity and development of the English civilization on its own soil was, within its limits, an extraordinary achievement. One could see in them perhaps better than in anything else how the natural, individual selective urge of the English race had achieved astonishing results in time past. Measuring a culture exactly as it ought to be measured, by the completeness, development and balance of the free individual within it, one saw in these rural types how inevitably English thought and life harked back to the past for its few original expressions and contributions to the present. When one thought of what would best draw the eyes of the outside world to England, one sent the Magna Charta or the Guards' band in their eighteenth century finery to the New York World's Fair, but any one of our rural neighbors on the Sussex farm could have demonstrated more ably if less spectacularly what had once, in the past, made England a living, vital case apart.

If one wanted to select what was best in England after some years' residence in it and reflection on it, one got quickly down to fundamental things, to things that showed to advantage a long heredity, like certain breeds of cattle, sheep and dogs, and to products that grew from a traditionally simple way of life like homespun cloth. Only by viewing the older rural types as they moved against the slack, stagnant and threatened life of Eng-

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land in our time could one appreciate how little relevance they had to a present which had no great value or relevance to them. As to what was happening in the world around them, all of them except John Graw, whose uprooted life had made him unique, possessed the same clues or notions as those of a child to the strange life of a house he has never visited. Barker's speech one day in the spring of 1938 was typical. He reported that Mussolini had just decided to expel the Jews from Italy and the "boys" at the pub thought it was a threat of the direst menace to the British Empire. "Muss" was going to pack them off to Abyssinia and, since Jews got rich wherever they went, it meant that in a few years they would buy up all of Africa. It eclipsed all other news in Barker's mind for days and he muttered a great deal about Solomon's mines. Coming at a time when Italian fliers were sinking British ships almost daily off the coast of Spain, Barker's preoccupation added a fantastic note to a fantastic period of English reasoning.

No amount of illustration with maps and atlases had ever succeeded in getting through the head of Martin, our ex-soldier cook, just where Czechoslovakia was. In this respect his ignorance fell just short of the self-confessed one of the Prime Minister of England; at least Martin's cookery never reached the all-record low or had the fatal results of Mr. Chamberlain's diplomacy, but his general ignorance was more complete than any we had met before and interested us profoundly. A dark, shabby,

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nervous man who had had five years with the army in India, his head contained a loose assortment of knowledge, none of which dovetailed, and which he carried around with him like a mechanic with a bag full of spanners and nuts that do not fit. His explanations of the wonders he had seen, ranging from three-legged calves and the ocean phenomena he had witnessed on his voyage to the life and habits of the "niggers" in India, were confused beyond anything we had ever heard and for the life of him he could never understand who Mr. Eden was. Mr. Chamberlain he came to know as the one who "had sold them poor people out" in Spain and Czechoslovakia and he hated him with a thoughtful hate. Although when Mr. Chamberlain suddenly grew wings to set out for Berchtesgaden, Martin's emotions were shaken for twenty-four hours.

Never a dull man, he knew his mental limitations and was content with them, accepting them as the animals and crops accepted the sun and the rain. And he, too, was a relief in the crepuscular mist that lay like an underlayer of fog over England in those days. Like Barker, like Roberts and drunken old Tom Wills, he, too, belonged to a case apart. His darkness, his sudden, shrewd humor, his flashes of intelligence, his stubborn independence and honesty, belonged to the older, more authentic animation of England that glanced through the dark, faded tapestries of modern English life now and then, like a child's face in a cave of mistrustful shadows.

10.

THERE WAS A CERTAIN DEAD-END LOOK

to the youth of the cottages around us compared with their fathers and grandfathers. None of the boys, except old Roberts's boy, could be induced to stay on the soil, and how Roberts managed that except by liberal doses of the stick, we could not imagine. That was all right. You could hardly expect the youth of today to look and act like their elders of yesterday, but all the elements of poise, skill and character that made the farm work around us such a satisfying thing to see, was entirely wanting in them. The highest aspiration of most of the youths on the farm, or, indeed, in the village, was to become lorry drivers or, what was better, bus drivers, to sit behind a big wheel in sun and rain and let her rip.

What things these youths could be induced to do to the soil or gardens they did only grudgingly or only in response to a show of force. They were far from being a cross-grained or ill-natured lot. Many of them, perhaps a large percentage of them, looked like good prime material, except for their teeth. They had neither the skill, patience, quiet fortitude or real character and ability of their fathers, nor the courage of their forefathers who had migrated long ago to Canada, America or the colonies. It was true that opportunities for settlers were no longer the same, but had they been the same or even better not one out of five young men we talked to on the

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farm or in the village would have had the pluck, fire or initiative to 'do anything about it. They clung to their cottage lanes, or gray, smoke-grimed alleys, to their pubs, dart games, greyhound races and football fields, like limpets to a mossy rock. Placed beside a man like Rand, the chimney sweep, and his indomitable, cheerful, fortress-like wife, who had prospered in Canada for twenty years, cleared their own acres, run a 960-acre farm between them, until the depression had forced them out and back again, they were soft, wavering stuff. With them the much-vaunted and once truly adventurous instincts of a sea-roving, empire-building people, had sunk to a trip to the cinema or a Saturday night at the pub.

It was true that they were harmless and good-mannered, often reserved and quiet, docile, to outward appearances, "safe" stuff, you might say, for police or politicians to handle. In that rut into which they had been allowed gently and paternally to settle by those into whose hands the destinies of England were trusted there were few thickets or brambles on either side. They had nothing to fear, except losing their jobs, and there was always the dole, and nothing to hope. They could not reasonably be compared to the hard-hit youth of America today, because America was still a ferment of experiment in space. Neither could they be compared to their fathers, the artisans of the older England.

With the smaller children of farm and village, we always had a great resource of friendship and pleasure.

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They were, like Martin's children, mostly very shy, with exactly the look in their dark eyes of rabbits who watch you carefully to get the direction of your movements, and they were merry, in a subdued way, though unexpectedly serious, like many of the children of the older civilizations. It took us exactly a year from the time when Martin brought his quiet, dark, inscrutable presence to our kitchen before the children accepted us completely, and became, on picnics and car rides, the kind of bubbling, active froth of life they were. There were five of them, beginning with Fred, the eldest boy, ranging to Frances, the "cuddly one" as her mother called her from her habit of clinging like a limpet to anything she could embrace with her small, round arms, mostly, in fact, her mother's neck. With her round, bright shoebutton eyes, her unchanging expression of blank inquiry, she resembled a doll rather than a human child; a slightly exotic doll that might have been of Oriental manufacture, and that owed its dark appeal, like the rest of Martin's children, to some ancient, pre-Saxon strain in the British blood which came out most strongly in the lower classes. The others all wore a gay, open expression, except little Freda, whose shyness was a great misery to her, inherited from her father and from her mother, who was so "miserable in company," as she expressed it to us, that she could not travel in a bus with other people but had to trudge the whole of the seven miles on foot and back when she went to see her old mother in Albourne.

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The devotion lavished on these youngsters by Martin and his wife was like the burning of a constant bright, silent flame. It was part of that really moving spirit in England that in its quiet, undemanding, unobtrusive way touches so many things that are small or weak with tenderness, gentleness and care, and must become to strangers, who live close to it and have seen it, one of the most compelling and one of the strongest features of the island life. A very old, strong and primitive feeling watched over and guarded the children. Entering Martin's home, which (even after he had moved from his condemned, crumbling cottage on the estate to one of the newly erected "council" houses) had a kind of denlike darkness and density all winter long, one had very much the feeling of having stepped into a cave full of watchfully guarded cubs. It was never an unpleasant feeling. It rose from those strains in the rural life of an advanced culture that know neither time nor change in their cleavage to the past in a world changing around them. It showed how far-between, few and tenuous are the threads that bind rural England to the present. In Martin's head was always that same deep, shadowy cavern like the one in which he sat in winter, motionless and silent, surrounded by the squirming shadows of his restless children thrown by the flickering of a single candle on the wall. Once in a while a beam of light filtered in, only to illuminate again fitfully the profound walls that closed them in.

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If one were to examine a family like this, or a half dozen less irreproachable ones, along the lanes or on the rather bald street where the neat council houses stood shoulder to shoulder, one saw how exactly they were fitted and measured to a world that had now largely ceased to be. They were also the tools in the great, ancient "vertical" economy of England's rural and industrial life, molded not as men are molded in the New World for quick uses, but by ages, centuries, generations; patient, painstaking and thorough at the one thing they could do well and little able to do anything else or anything that their fathers had not done before them. Times had changed around them and they had not but their children would have to, and we could see plainly the educational processes that were to effect that change. It was a vaguely comforting thing to see this spirit and to watch it in operation in the local primary schools. It was gradualness at its best, and perhaps if the rest of the world had been content with anything like this gradualness all would have been as it should be.

The school age had been advanced to fourteen after the First World War, and there was talk of making it sixteen. That was a terrific step up in the whole educational process for a system that had never regarded wholesale education in any way but negatively, or waveringly, or quizzically. It still seemed better, quizzically, to regard the children of the lower classes as uneducable after fourteen; or to look on them, after that age, as possibly and

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marginally slightly educable, and do something about it in a marginal and pessimistic manner. That, it might be conceded, was as wise as most or many things, providing England had been a case alone and to itself; and even Martin, when we asked him, showed a considerable doubt as to what education beyond reading and writing and a knowledge of figures could possibly accomplish except in setting a boy's mind to wandering when he ought to be beginning to earn his keep. The general feeling that a man who did anything exceeding the normal expectancies of the class to which he was born was dangerous was very strong in Martin. Indeed, it was perhaps the strongest thing in him: the most obdurate progressive in the world would have left Martin's presence holding his head in his hands. As it was, no one could look ahead to anything like an educational opportunity for his children beyond the three R's in our neighborhood without a sense of miracle and mystification. Even if a boy passed the preliminary examination entitling him to begin what would correspond to a high-school course in America, it meant an enormous sacrifice for his family, who would not only be cut off from his earnings but be obliged to support him at those strange, bookish games which began with a boy's hoping he might become a gentleman and ended with his becoming a freak. Education to Martin was "for them as could afford it," it was like fish or fruit for tea. To urge our own side of the argument on him seemed futile, wasteful and slightly brutal. His relief

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when his oldest boy flunked the preliminary examinations and thus disposed of the whole problem was only matched by his quiet satisfaction when the youngster got his first Saturday job at the greengrocer's for sixpence and his dinner.

At the same time, no one was disposed to doubt the soundness or quality of the teaching in the primary schools around us and neither were we. Fred could write a good, fair hand at the age of eleven where Martin could only print on paper, and that with great labor, exercise of mind, and patience. To a certain extent, one might say Fred's world began where Martin's, sunk in the old rural tradition of farm labor, left off. Fred's world was a world of motorcars and airplanes, and, more recently, of gas masks, and as soon as he was able to apprentice himself at the age of fourteen to the air force he would begin to consider the world as something down the sights of a gun barrel, in that respect repeating the educational processes of youth in other parts of Europe.

But then, Fred was a promising youngster, genuinely bright, genuinely quick. Along Fred's street of council houses there were other youngsters, not one half so quick or alert, who would not even see the world down the sights of a gun barrel, whose home conditions had none of the deep, bear-in-the-cave contentment of Martin's, whose faces, at the age of ten, wore a look of suffering, disease and crabbed old age.

11. **T**O TURN FROM THE DEEPER BACK-grounds of village life, to its gaze out on the incidents and phenomena of the life around it, was always quite simple for us. For we were from the outside, and what the village knew and thought could sometimes, though never exactly, be sized up within the small frame that our residence there offered. Much as we respected and liked Mr. Jenners, we could never talk serious politics with him; he was a little too close to the line of respectability and conformity not to be afraid of "giving the show away" to foreigners. In him, because he was a mild-mannered man, deeply goodhearted and rootedly kind, the strange, perverse jealousy that seizes certain Englishmen in the face of any transatlantic phenomena, including living individuals, was never an active or semi-aggressive principle as it was with, for example, the manager of the bank and his clerks who looked down their account books and their noses at everything without a sound, sterling guarantee.

The bank manager's attitude toward us from first to last was curious and worthy of study, reflecting the deeper, intuitive strains of the English outlook on strangers and other unfamiliar things. He was a tall, thin, elderly man with schoolmasterly eyes behind spectacles, and he never lost an opportunity (most of which were

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proffered freely in the course of conversations in his small, dark private office) to cross-examine us closely with an air of profound penetration on our reasons for living in England.

He had made up his mind, from a limited experience confined to newspaper reading and an occasional cinema, a conversation or two as well, that America was a pretty bad place, and he wanted confirmation of this and nothing less than this, at the same time being prepared to admit benevolently that we fell far short of his worst expectations. In fact, one gathered after a number of these conversations that he was quite ready to like us providing we were fully aware of our defect in not having been born in Sussex and his high esteem was measured by his often repeated phrase that he did not think of us as Americans at all. When I asked him gently one day what he really knew of America and Americans, he replied that he'd read a book and had once met two Americans in an inn, low fellows who had complained loudly and vulgarly about the inconveniences of the place. When I said that I also had heard a great many complaints of the loud speech, manners and conduct of English people when traveling, he was completely taken aback, cogitated a while on my remark, and then said that what I meant was that there were disagreeable people in every country and that after all, nowadays, America was "beginning to see the light." "Seeing the light" meant the realization that it was the entire duty of America and Americans to

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spring to the support of England at any time of trouble.

He went on: "What we can't always see here is why they keep hanging back."

It would have done no good to explain my deeper feeling, that though there were things and people in England worthy of any man's support, no foreigner could face the thought of 120,000,000 people living three thousand miles away springing to the support of the Chamberlain government of England, so I said instead: "We don't look on ourselves and we don't like to be looked on as colonials or empire subjects. All these things are more difficult and less simple from a viewpoint three thousand miles away than they are here."

He said promptly: "I don't see the difficulty."

I asked: "Would you for your part be willing to come to the rescue of America under all circumstances at all times? Don't your remarks to me really mean that you and a great many people would hardly think America worth saving?"

Things were getting a little uncomfortable, and he looked out the window. I knew that it was not in him to be unkind and that he had meant no unkindness. But a great many things stood back of this, including a whole vast, solid segment of British thought, and I said: "We have troubles of our own in America, very bitter and very grave."

He looked at me closely for a moment, nodded and

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scratched his chin thoughtfully: "You find us all right here?"

I answered, "My wife and I are very happy here."

He said, reverting to the old topic: "Isn't it your Western people who make most of the trouble?"

"America is about as wide from east to west as the Atlantic," I said. "In the East people look to Europe a great deal. I happen to be from the East. But I can understand the point of view of a Kansas farmer who says: 'What business of mine is it how they muck themselves up in Europe? We've got enough bad politics here.' And I think I can understand the point of view of a Clydeside riveter who doesn't know where Canada stops and America begins and doesn't care a hang. I think honestly that even to expect them to believe or think the same thing at the same time is about as easy and sensible as trying to make water run uphill."

He leaned over and said: "You helped us in the last war."

"I have heard people here say that we helped too late," I said, "or that we didn't help enough, or that we only got in when victory was a sure thing, or that it would have been better if we had stayed out, or that we only helped in the war and then pushed our allies out on the limb with the peace; and I have heard at least one chap say that American soldiers were more of a menace to the Allies than to the Germans with their crazy shooting and high pay. I have heard that we only went into it because

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we were afraid our profiteers might lose their shirts. I have never, since I have lived here, heard anyone say a decent thing of American participation in the last war except one or two farm chaps. Even if all of it were true, or none of it were true, it makes a very confusing picture."

The response to that came hastily. "The war debts. That's a very confusing thing. We should have paid, I think."

I said: "I don't know. It has never seemed to me to be an issue. I doubt if it is anything like a real issue with people at home."

"Then you don't think your people are going to look ahead far enough to see that they must help us?" he asked. "They talk enough, anyway."

"I think that most decent Americans and most decent Englishmen, if they could forget themselves and get together, could be made to see about the same thing," I said. "I think that applies to Germans and Frenchmen and Russians too. But they can't be brought together in that way. Too many things are in the way. Time and distance are only two of them. Therefore, they can be told to shoot each other and do. A lot of people around here were ready to stop Hitler at the time of Munich. They were told they were all wrong: that Mr. Chamberlain would fix it up; that they could go home and sleep in peace. It seems to me it's going to be harder to get the same people, or other people, to believe the same thing twice. But what always surprises people who move

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around is not the number of people who hate each other, but the overwhelming mass of people who only want to be let alone to lead decent, friendly lives together if they can. It hasn't surprised us here, after a period of time, that there are some kinds of people we don't like. What has surprised us is the number of people we do respect and like. That they don't happen to be the sorts of people that most Americans get around to see when they come here is only another interesting thing. If you went to America you might have many surprises, not all of them unpleasant."

"But you and your wife. Surely you know what I mean when I say we don't think of you here as Americans?"

I said: "The point is that we are. The only difference between us and many others is that they are tied and can't move about, and we have managed to keep ourselves footloose."

"So that," he said quickly, "you'll be able to tell your people how we stand for the right over here."

"I don't know," I told him. "You may stand for the right as you see it, and I may try to, too. And so may any number of separate human individuals. It might lead to something, in my own country too, if people stopped shouting about their rights and thinking instead what wrongs their rights sometimes do to other people. Probably we're doing nothing to boast of or be proud of in America. I don't know because we have been away a very long time. But I haven't honestly been able to conceive,

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and I have never met an honest person who could conceive, why this whole brawling mess couldn't have been stopped, at any one of a number of given points, in any one of a given number of years before Munich. That is a terrible thing for people over here to have to swallow; and it's worse for people in America, if they do have to swallow it. What millions of outsiders are going to think or be made to think I just can't imagine. I know that wherever I am in the world, I feel differently about a great many things. I can't be here and not feel differently than in New York. If I were born in Idaho, I'd feel differently again, or in Yorkshire, or in Guatemala or Shanghai. I like people who think of themselves as human beings first, and as Americans or Englishmen or Chinamen only second. It is difficult, and one can't always live up to it and sometimes it is impossible, but it simplifies a great many things. That is the way my wife and I have tried to think of people here, and that is the way we'd like others to try to think of us."

After that talk, the barometer fell visibly every time we entered the bank. It was too much; it was always too much for people like the bank manager to face the fact that a foreigner might be as self-respecting as he was. With the most careful allowances for the edginess of strangers in a strange environment, it often seemed to us that the cause of truth in the dense, provincial thickets of English education and thinking was a fox gone to hole,

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and it was always necessary to be a little foxy not to be caught entirely off one's guard in matters which went deep to the heart of the relations between Americans and Englishmen. It was easy to see and appraise the blind, worrying, fidgety jealousy that was at work behind a great many English middle-class minds when confronted with the unexpected phenomenon of a powerful country speaking the same language but not having the same thoughts. It was a problem that worried us not so much because it made us liable to attack in unexpected places, as because it was a morbid condition gnawing away at the roots of any real, solid, heartfelt loyalty between the English-speaking nations and liable, at any moment, to throw over even the ties of common self-interest which seemed to us real.

We could not help feeling that for this condition there was no actual help. The susceptibilities that we, as foreigners, were continually brushing up against in the village, among the kind of people who by profession or pretense were supposed to know a larger world, were as tender as antennae. Of really valid or intelligent self-criticism that might have pried England loose from her sometime pleasant but now dangerous old rut, there was not an ounce in a ton of them.

When one went up a bit higher on the social and also the intellectual ladder, the thinner and more rarefied air one breathed there was no whit more convincing. The remark that was made to us at the time of the Czecho-

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slovak betrayal by the son of the Squire was a good case in point. "We're a lot of bloody swine, don't you think?" Whatever our own particular feeling at the time, had I agreed with him he would have been utterly dumfounded. That kind of remark, tossed off lightly as we had often heard it by certain types of educated young people, betrayed the man who made it like a tag. It was a tag as innocent of self-revulsion or honest dismay as a dog collar. The implication was too obviously a cheerful one: "Even if we are swine, we're confoundedly clever ones; our swinishness is better than anyone else's virtue, since it is our own." It was, as we saw, a way of speaking only.

12. **T**O STRAY AGAIN FOR A MOMENT FROM the picture of farm and village to another sort of picture entirely, one had only to take the case of the young foreman at the Brighton garage where our old car spent a good deal of its uncertain life. One would have to go a long way to find a finer young chap than he, with his bullethead of blond cropped hair, his round flushed cheeks, his straight blue eyes, his hands each finger of which seemed to have been born with a brain in it that went straight to the root of an old engine's sorrow. And one would have to go still farther to find a man with more of the fires of bewildering and angry resentment smoldering in him. We had many rides together that were merely excuses for "testing the car out" during the days before and after Munich. What he really wanted to test was himself or me, or rather himself against me, for I had come many miles from another land and couldn't I understand what sort of a — place this country was that landed a man in a rut at the age of twenty-five and laid long loads of brick on his head to keep him there?

Possibly because he was a remarkable man and the finest mechanic I had ever known, as well as a shop foreman whose ways with his men were a delight to see, his case seemed to have a significance beyond most and to shed a light into the dark and moldy lanes down which

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an uneducated Englishman's life wanders until it expires at the other end of the rut in which it was conceived. He was a man whose anger at the Munich "settlement" exceeded all the bounds of anger we met in the small decent folk of England. He came from a family of five in a neighboring village and at the age of sixteen had gone from delivering the greengrocer's parcels to work in a small local garage. He had a somewhat Biblical way of telling his life story, possibly derived from his mother, a pious and Biblical woman, whose chief admonition to him in his youth had been against "getting ahead" too fast. She had had a brother who had got ahead too fast in the tramp steamer of which he was boatswain, and rising to the position of second mate had run his ship ashore in a fog off Beachy Head, lost his license and later taken to drink. "And you wouldn't believe it," he said to me, "but when I got to be foreman in that first little garage, she warned me. She said: 'Jem, you're nineteen and you're already ahead and making more than your father. Stop where you are, Jem.' That's always been her way with me. And she's even got my wife talking: 'Stop where you are, Jem. Look where goin' ahead too fast got your uncle.'"

He would stop and stare at me when he came to this point in his narrative, as though half expecting that I, too, might have a warning up my sleeve. He reminded me, then, of a strong, young dray horse with its head yanked up by a tight checkrein. He was utterly without

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the imagination to free himself alone or think his way out of anything, and his whole mind was a hodgepodge of Sunday-school tags and moral restraints that lay like a litter of damp rags on the fires of his ambition and urgency.

“Out there in your country, they don’t tell a man to stop and stand where he is. But here, wherever you step, you get into a rut. It’s all right for them as likes it, and I know some people do. I’ve worked hard since I was fourteen and now I’m as far at twenty-six as I’ll ever get or can ever possibly get.”

It didn’t seem to me that it would do any good to tell him that in America, too, the times had changed and the sky was no longer the limit.

He went on: “Everything, everyone works together here to stop a man. I have men of fifty working under me in this garage, good mechanics too, who think themselves lucky with three quid a week. It’s not the pay they get; that’s not everything. It’s the way you get hushed up any time you want to do anything different or push ahead. It goes on in school; it goes on at home; it goes on in church. What they’re really trying to tell a man is this: ‘Don’t get gay with your monkey wrench or spanners. Don’t touch a bolt of the old machine, otherwise it might fly to pieces.’ If you’re what’s called a decent man here you’re expected to sit in the same boots you were born in until you die in them. Then they preach a sermon over your old bootlaces. They hold them up and say, ‘See what good old laces they are. Why, they might

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'a' been his grandfather's. They're so good and strong."

When we returned to Sussex in the spring of 1939, he had vanished, sailed for Kenya. We missed him, for he was a fine man, and the hours I had spent in the oily workshop sitting on the step of the old car and talking to him, were among my pleasantest hours in England; hours that could be compared in flavor only to the evenings when John Graw came in to sit by the fire in the candlelight, one enormous hand shielding the "bad" side of his face from the light, and talked about the farm and his frank fears for what England was coming to. But when we thought of that blond bullethead, that wide, earthy grin, out somewhere under a high sun and sky, and turned to look at the little picturesque lanes, with the soot and fog of the centuries over them, from which he had gone, we felt better.

13.

YET OF ALL THE PLACES WHERE WE had ever lived, the Sussex farm was the one where the simple act, the honest word, the kindly gesture, counted most and was valued most, simply and exactly for what it was. There was a power of goodness in it all that every now and again rose up to devour the clamor of our deeper questionings. Should we accept all that we saw, or were forced to see, as most Americans feel themselves impelled or compelled to do, on faith or on balance, when they seek to link their own roots with the taproot of a much older growth? But it seemed to us that most American testimony on England in time past and present was sprung from two equally distant points of darkness: imitation or irritation, and because we knew and had tested the potency of these two things, we wished to steer a course between.

If we had any pin point of value to those around us, in return for deep value received, it lay just in the force of our detachment. To flatter a self-flattery that was the weakest condition in the better-educated England of our day seemed to us deeply revolting. The most formidable enemy that had ever sprung on England was her middle-class complacency in the twenties and thirties, a blindness that in so old a growth could only be viewed as a malformation; should we join up with this smug hue and

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cry, we were traitors before we spoke. To live under a shady oak, under a thatch of the centuries, to take in the *London Times* and the *Telegraph*, to persuade oneself that all was right with a world where servants were still respectful—well, it could be done, it was a little game and many Americans had played it in the past and the present—but it just wouldn't work. It wouldn't work because Americans hadn't been brought up to that or for that; nor would any assumptions of Anglo-American co-operation or solidarity based on anything like this ever work. British self-satisfaction, probably the greatest of England's many problems at home and abroad, would have to take a step down before it took a step in any direction; in the present state of mankind in Europe, it was a simply suicidal tendency. We did not think that American complacency was as thick, as centuries old, or such a dangerous growth.

If that were true, or any part of it, then what we were obligated to do was to use our eyes, our wits, our ears, such things as we had been blessed with, or imagined we had been blessed with, at birth; and not such shagreen spectacles as the Archbishop of Canterbury, or the editor of the *Times*, or Sir John Simon put on in addressing their respective flocks. In that way, although we disbelieved that the two branches of the English-speaking family could ever like each other either cordially or long, we might at least find out why they wasted so much time

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cursing each other in a world where it was always possible—when it came both to glancing ahead and to glancing back—to descry a faint mist on the sky line that in some ways at least hinted darkly of a common horizon. That was inexact, speculative and confused, perhaps; but what we did know exactly was that no men we had ever met or were ever likely to meet in the world stood for us quite for what Barker and old Roberts and our own man Martin stood. No people that we had ever met had the same light, lucid appreciation of the things that are fundamentally genuine: kindness and humor and a courtesy based on both. There was much of this in many walks of English life in our time, a little threadbare and out of elbow from lack of work, that might have been taken up at once and with the faintest gleam of imagination, put to good use in England's behalf in parts of the world as distant as Dublin and Addis Ababa.

Perhaps there were still many parts of Europe where this spirit could be found. We did not know. But what we did know, as Americans, was how much more precious than gold it was, how rare it was in our own land, how that land of ours suffered and tortured itself for lack of it. Perhaps it was only to say that the essential spirit of the Old World was still there; that if Europe suffered or Europe died, it would be only for lack of the essential qualities of leadership, for that strange imbalance and weakness of the head that was squeezing the heart and paralyzing the lungs.

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For all that rose straight from the soil and the honest workshops of England seemed to us good, at times astonishingly good, and the character it bred, except in the youth of the day, even better. For all their lack of vitality, which a thoughtful system might have remedied, there was enough honest, homespun stuff left in England to reweave a new world—if only the spinners and weavers had been there.

Somewhere along the line of considerations like these was the heart of the matter. And, reflecting again on men like Barker and Rand, on women like Mrs. Grimshaw and Mrs. Rand and their children, we felt that in our own way, in our own time, we had come close to that heart in many small ways and matters. To all that concerned it, in its loyalties, its courage, its faith, it stood absolutely steadfast. Yet it was faced by a vast and continuous threat in our time; by a spirit that, when it did raise its eyes from its deep bemusement with its own past, only looked at the clock to see if it had stopped.

And certainly those sincere and honest genuflections before the image and memory of the long-dead Squire that we came across so often in the cottages around us, was more than passingly interesting. Certainly if the Old Squire, all booted and spurred and handsomely whiskered and mounted, had ridden up to our gate, we should have been inclined to leave by the other gate. And yet there was something in it, something very deep.

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Because the goodness, the sheer worth of these people in the wobbly, crazy world of modern Europe, in the tight, vacant and claustrophobic atmosphere of middle-class England, impressed us so deeply, it was very hard to turn away. But for them, their gentleness, their humor, their innate, deep courtesy, we should have been marooned on those dismal shores of pensioned or rentier or retired respectability that lapped around the village and the farm. And these people, these Jenners, Rands, Grimshaws and Martins, with a few words and gestures had painted another picture for us. They had seemed to say: "See, we are men of goodwill, and out of our goodwill we can recognize yours. And that is all that decent men ask. We have lived side by side here and have not hurt each other. This is a good place to be."

And because of this, and looking through their eyes, we saw it was a good place to be.

And there was more in it even than that. For when a man trusts you and you trust him, no matter what your other differences are, you are often looking at the same thing. No one minded when old Tom Wills fell into the ditch after three days and nights consulting the bottle, except to put an overcoat under him, get him to the haystack or back to the hut where he slept immediately behind the pigs. "Drunk or sober," as Martin always said, "he's one of the best." Or, as old Roberts had it: "He'll be sore missed when he drowns hisself in the pond one night." The community of pleasure and general approba-

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tion that was shared in an old, drunken, broken soldier, lately turned farm laborer, was solid from end to end of the lane. You couldn't have him in the house in his brighter moments, because he fell over things, broke them and wet his bed. But you could have his great, round, smiling, toothless face coming down the lane like a good red moon; a moon with a cockeyed glint to it that shone for all equally, was always good-natured, drunk or sober, would turn its pockets out for the children or a stranger; and could get quite set about the jaw and sober when it came to many things that happened about the time of Munich. You could share in all this as in the pleasures and rich varieties of wind, storm and seasons; and, sharing the good, how could you spare yourself at least some of the darker side as well?

Part III
The Clutch at the Past

14. **I**F ONE WERE TO LEAVE THE LANES and hills of the Sussex farm and drive straight up and down the spine of England from Brighton to Edinburgh, as we often drove, or crisscrossed east and west from South Wales through the Midlands to the soft plains of Lincolnshire, one's mind added up a number of details that together colored the whole. Again the weedy youth, the decayed, dreary life, the ruined factory chimneys, the crawling gray villages flung out like extensions of the London slums across the dark, shaggy hills of South Wales, flowerless, treeless, furnished a depth to begin with. Advancing north and east through the lovely rural landscapes of Hereford and Shropshire, one dropped from the high wastes and moors of the Peak district which the Brontës knew into the teeming, lightless, almost subterranean existence of Sheffield and Leeds. Between these things were those inimitable contrasts of moorland, fenland, mountain peak and gentle rural valley that give English scenery its varying elements of majesty and softness, binding it close to reverie, imagination and history, justifying perfectly its claim as the most balanced and richest scenery in the world.

A splendid Georgian country house, barely glimpsed between passages of trees and enclosing parks, fetched the mind loose from its moorings in the solid, breathless squalor of the mining towns one had seen and pondered

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and brought it to the enormous tenacity of a more fragrant past. Yet coasting between lines of jerry-built bungalows on the more respectable fringes of Manchester or Leeds, each with its blue or mustard-colored curtains flapping in the smoke-laden wind, one was brought hard up against that same life-squalor again. There was a cheap, glaring unsightliness to these "developments" that gave even the slum cottages of an earlier age an authentic depth. Looking up at the enormous and terrifying bulk of some new block of workers' flats, screened in iron balconies and set in an uncompromising muddle between railroad yards and gas works, one was yet again up against it.

Here was a thing well worth looking into. In the meantime the ruts of the old and shoddy and shopworn opened out on all sides from these not too splendid vistas of the future. How many streets there are to wander in, all faintly lifeless, all presenting the same dun aspect, a little discouraged, a little dreary, set in the same gray doorsteps and low, lowering windows, hung with the same sides of beef in butchers' shops, the same small piles of oranges and cabbages in the fruiterers', before one comes again on the soft green heart of rural England! At times those streets, the thousands and thousands of miles of them there are in England, which have spawned their life and live on only to molder, oppress the mind like a nightmare.

The spire of Ely might rise for us as it has risen in the

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minds of many men above the green-dark Cambridge plain. The lovely span of Greta Bridge, the Meeting of the Waters, the dark configuration of the hills above Grasmere, the sweet dales and lonely moors of Yorkshire, the high, wild wastes of the Border—were they not as Scott and Wordsworth had left them? Or the hills that rose so gravely and gently behind our Sussex farmhouse—were they not the same as when they had sheltered the men who lived on them before history began? Which was England, then, this or that? And where now lay that same spirit, now in time of burning questions, of shock, of infinite disaster, of England's greatest need?

Always the Sussex farm stood there at each journey's end, expecting our return, anticipating our departure. It went back to a point in time that was, for us at least, a beginning of English time, to the time of the Norman Conquest. The remains of the Roman road that ran straight up the hill from the farm across the fields was another beginning in time, but over these things the night shade of the centuries held too deeply, and all that concerned us in the laboratory was the alchemy that had changed England from the time of our farmhouse to the time of the great humming mills or the sprawling, broken towns of Lancashire and Wales.

And sometimes we sat there wondering. Would it be possible for us who knew so little to wander over that vast shadowy distance in a straight line by so feeble a

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light as we had? If so, we would do it swiftly and directly, not trying to make pictures out of it, for the pictures were only in the present and in the things that we could see today. Once England had looked very much like the place around us, farm, manor, village and field. Then England had changed, and though the past still existed as our farm existed, what we had seen outside was the spawn of this change. And before going on to finish or frame our picture we had to ask ourselves what this change was and how it had come about in the light of the fruit it had left.

All around us were ruins and remnants of England's past. In a sense we had attached ourselves to a remnant, a remnant that still had life within it and throve. That is what most Americans do when they come to England, but it is an even stronger habit of English people themselves. The rather wistful reaching backward into the past that has caused the New England countryside of America to spring to life again, not a very authentic life but still a life of sorts, has had for years its counterpart in England—with this difference: that America likes to step back into the rejuvenated shell of its past in order to avoid or forget the soaring ascendancy of present and future, but in England one goes back because there is no way of going ahead.

Scattered about us, the old farmhouses with any pretensions to architecture or period, and many of the old

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mossy laborers' cottages as well, were being picked over by real estate agents and sold at premiums to city dwellers. Architects with a flair for that kind of thing were doing a thriving business modernizing them without spoiling the "atmosphere." Side by side with any vigorous solution of the architectural problems of English living, urban or otherwise, this might have been an interesting development; independent of them, it was the simplest sort of admission, to our eyes, that the things done to the countryside in England had been done once for all, could never be better done, and that all that had been done in the industrial era was as useless as all that was being done in the present was vulgar and depressing.

It was depressing to us, centered in a lovely, mossy part of the preindustrial era, to think that this was so; that even if towns like Bradford and Leeds and the waterfront boroughs of London had had to be built in a certain grim age and time, towns like Peacehaven and the outlying fringes of Littlehampton should be produced today to give the English seacoast from Kent to Cornwall the general air of slatternliness that overcomes a city slum on washing day. It reflected the same speculative irresponsibility which some years ago covered large tracts of Long Island acreage with identical Moorish villas shoulder to shoulder. Contrasted with the efforts made in Denmark, Holland and Sweden to build in the present so that future generations might not live to regret their ancestors, this was a curious and striking thing to grow up

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in the midst of a domestic architecture that has been unrivaled for centuries.

The building boom of the thirties that had picked England out of the slump was a planless, sprawling muddle, an often dishonest muddle of bogus construction that ruined whole miles of countryside just at the time when large sections of the outer world were beginning to wake to the necessity of planned developments and the evils of exaggerated profiteering in housing. Apparently no one had ever considered, much less tackled, the problem of building today in England so that the England of tomorrow should not look much worse than the England of its Victorian yesterday. And those who did care—and there were many—about the attributes of a charming countryside were content to conceal themselves behind a façade of the centuries in ancient, restored ruins amid reminders of an age when rural ugliness had nowhere come into prominent existence, when building suitably and beautifully was simply a normal part of building strongly and well, long before the industrial age with its festooned and festering ugliness had appeared.

Yet a denial of the awkwardness, the enormous confusion of a great deal of English life and living was a denial of England's chief and essential problem—the problem that had never been solved when England was turned from an agricultural civilization into the world's workshop; the problem that was now even more acute when England is the world's workshop no longer and her agri-

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culture insufficient to support one-fifth of her working population. There were times, all too many times, when this clutch at the past, with its denial by implication of all the problems of the present, seemed to us a perplexing and tragic symptom. The number of people who were always wandering back into the past for support—spiritual support, moral support, even common architectural support—struck us as continually fantastic. The present, whether it was in the theater, in literature, in art or the movies, or merely in us as representatives of the present, as Americans, made some people writhe and shudder. And the light or heavy and contemptuous disdain for the present which marked the responsible sorts of people immured in small, pre-Victorian oases, who lived, as the Squire's son, our neighbor, lived, in a Georgian wing attached to an Elizabethan structure, was to us faintly dismal and a little fatal.

For, although a great many of these people were, unlike the Squire's son, sensitive and courageous in their own light and deeply, consistently kind to their own sorts of people and even, occasionally, to strangers, their heads were full of curious ideas about England, most of them resembling the bric-a-brac on their own shelves. Thus they complained of the food in France, the commercial taint of Americans, the cruelty of Spaniards, their eyes forever riveted on their own fireside and the Sunday roast. The persuasion that all good things were to be found in the British Isles, if only one looked far enough

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or scratched deep enough, had its part in the persuasion that, barring a few foibles (which Dickens and Thackeray had touched on in their books), nothing really bad was to be found there. What hadn't been invented or accomplished by the British was hardly worth admitting on the score of real achievement. It was a comfortable doctrine and one which filled us continually with real discomfort and dismay.

England had built her house. If it looked queer sometimes to foreigners, it was well known that foreigners had queer eyes, though certain foreigners who admired England loudly and sufficiently had good hearts. In that house were many rooms with many drawers, closets and cupboards. What concerned every Englishman properly was his drawer or his cupboard, which he called his castle. The other drawers and cupboards were simply not his business. They had been built by abler men than he, revered men, like the Old Squire, ancestors, statesmen, of whom he spoke, when he felt like it, with awe. All of us are a little inclined this way, some more than a little. Once in that drawer, the winds may howl and the tempest blow, the Englishman is at home. But none of us, whether in America or on the continent of Europe, can escape so completely into one drawer and slide it shut.

We could not see a thing like this and not see some virtue in it, more especially that virtue of a perfect sense of security which an Englishman habitually derives from

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his familiar environment. We could not see it and not wonder what, in default of any standard of comparison or other than textbook education, most Englishmen really know about England. In our own village among casual acquaintances, if we mentioned the industrial era we were treated as though we had invented it or imported it from America. Refined people did not admit Leeds or Bradford and had never visited either of them probably for the same reasons that refined Bostonians in the good old days could not bring themselves to admit Chicago or Detroit. To live in an eighteenth century place and admit the Welsh mining towns at the same time was to admit evil. You chose, if you were fortunate enough to be able to do so, the era most suitable to you and identified yourself with it. Most people in our village chose the Victorian era. It went with more limited sorts of incomes; it also went with the things the ironmonger supplied—lamps, oilstoves, candlesticks. It went with the high cost of electricity and the prohibitive cost of gas for cooking. It went with that extraordinary thing most deeply fixed in English minds—that there, in that age, their house had been completed, the dormers fixed, the chimneys built. Wealthier people might do fantastic things, such as denying by implication that a Victorian era had ever existed, and youngsters might flout it.

But the life of our village, the architecture of our village, and the men of our village were Victorian, knew they were Victorian, and liked it.

15.

WHAT MOST DEEPLY CONCERNED US

in these things was the question whether, since we were not economists or historians but simply visitors living in an atmosphere that had responded timidly, a little tentatively, but on the whole kindly to our advances, we were competent observers or not. As the long sick days of crisis and brief recovery from crisis unrolled around us, each season, it seemed, marking a culmination more bewildering and desperate than the last, our attention flew from this to that, but always in that search, as of despairing mortals not knowing when the time was at hand, flew to the clock on the wall. It was then that we understood most clearly that the time and the relative strength of England, her position today in history, were of unparalleled importance to Americans. If we were to discover it in the long years of watch and waiting, it would be through our pores and senses, through the equations of day-by-day living, as simple and slow as the sheet of mist that rose from the plowed land to grope up the hills at night.

Other eyes and ears around us were sensitive to it in other ways. Never before, perhaps, in all her long history had such a quantity of attack and criticism rolled out from English pens in the face of the peculiar, basic phenomena of English life and assumptions in the present:

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"I submit," said J. B. Priestley in his own book about the state of England, "that during these last few years our national life has been riddled with complacency, hypocrisy, snobbery and stupidity. Never before have we made so much fuss about trivialities. Never before have we congratulated ourselves so much with so little cause for congratulation. Whole sections of our press have been absolutely nauseating. If we all woke one morning to find ourselves paralyzed, these papers would congratulate us. 'Let foreigners go moving about,' they would say, 'but the ordinary, decent British citizen has wisely decided to stay in bed.' "

Exactly so it looked in our time, with old mother Chamberlain coming back on wings from Munich and other places to tuck in the covers until the long, easy snores changed to snorts at the time of Prague. But one could be uncharitable about these things as well as unwise. If England was being beguiled to slumber, drugged, as we believed, and deliberately drugged in times more perilous to ordinary Englishmen than any in their history since the Spanish Armada, there would be one of a dozen reasons, but the deepest reason of all would never start out to meet the eyes. Perhaps it would only soak in gradually, day by day and slowly, through the heart and pores before it even began to penetrate the upper level of the mind. Perhaps in allowing ourselves to be carried along, to drift with the days and seasons, through crisis, recov-

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ery, new shock, through seedtime and harvest, through small, dry remarks of simple men, delivered haltingly, out of breath, as it were, as a runner delivers his message, we were on the right track after all. Perhaps it was all a question of time, of the clock on the wall ticking away the rise, flourish, decline of man, oak, cattle, dog, nation or empire. Perhaps—and in our hearts we dreaded that day most of all—the sleeper would rise, push back the bedclothes, and stare at the hands of the clock and the handwriting on the wall, and see in the faint afterglow through the windows of the house he had built the end of the great day and the harvest of the fields unharvested. Then, in the passion of those frustrated hours, would come the fixing of the blame, the close, deadly reckoning. That lay ahead in time and what concerned us in the silence of our little place in England was a single clock on a single wall.

But other eyes were looking in on England from outside, eyes more wide awake than ours, searching England, scouring her, trying to track down the time of English supremacy to a split second. To quote Count Pueckler: "The triumphal crusade of British capital throughout the world has come to an end. The estate inherited from the nineteenth century must now be defended from very serious dangers indeed, and the danger is intensified by the fact that Great Britain is now living on her capital for the first time in a very long period."

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In such fields, the fields of statistics, of export and import balances, the underlying postulates for the clarifications other men sought, we were not qualified to form final opinions. But in the other fields, the simple human ones, or the field, as some say, of the spirit, we could wander all day long listening and wondering. And it seemed to us that if one thing was true—if England was living on her capital in one field—she was also living on her capital in many fields, creating little if any new capital in the men of her time in mind, body or spirit.

Was this really true or were we generalizing? What were the facts that loomed so close to us on every side during our life in England that you could not move without bumping them? The only safe path, it seemed to us, for a faintly dispirited political system lay in some kind of leveling off, a break-through of new blood and vigor from below or from the colonies and dominions, or else an immense, progressive democratic process working toward some such kind of solid, even system as the Scandinavian countries represented. From time to time Englishmen, and not all of them labor leaders or socialists, had cast longing eyes across the North Sea toward Denmark and Sweden, quite well aware, many of them, that these lands stood for the acme of social development within a liberal framework. That was nice in theory, but the real trouble with it was that it was not British theory as applied to the solid facts of government. British theory as applied to British problems had achieved an advanced

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state of socialism, far beyond anything that America had yet dreamed of, much less put into practice; the British civil service, the pension and retirement acts, the old-age and sickness benefits were such things as Americans needed good, sound lessons in.

The fact remained that the British system was paternal in both its functioning and its conception. The question here again was not what advances England had made since the industrial revolution within her social framework far exceeding American advances: the question was what lay beyond them, at their end; or whether, in all truth, the British theory had not run its course, as applied to its own home problems. On the part of neither the masses nor the classes, if one could judge from using one's ears and wits, was a desire for change anything but an occasion for oratory; one could take that as an expression of the age-old solidarity of England or one could take it less kindly but perhaps more realistically as a great many thoughtful Englishmen took it, as a dead end. One could say that paternalism, even liberal paternalism, had struck a snag and had decided, under its present leadership, on a policy of somewhat stealthy but nevertheless vigorous backwatering.

If this was not a thing so very apparent to the world outside, it was still quite clear to a good many English people, and quite vigorously apparent to those around us, who, unlike the solid, "devoted" middle classes, had been forced by the irregularities and uncouthness of their own

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lives to take up an independent line of thought. Whatever the real significance or the real machinery behind the abdication of Edward VIII, there was a single line of thought about it in the heads of certain people that neither the ill-mannered spite of the Church of England nor the pompous homilies of a certain part of the press ever made much headway against. It might have been expressed in the words of John Graw: "What they hated about Edward was not his carrying-on here and there and all about the place, but his independence. He wanted to see things for himself; and he did see things for himself, and what he did see he didn't always like and told them so. It all came down to the question of what was a king for and whose king he was. There were a lot of people in this country who thought a king was a good thing, because he could get right down to people if he wanted to. But those on top never liked his way of walking into a slum or a cottage, if he had a mind to, and talking to people and then telling what he thought about it afterwards; especially when he had some strong thoughts about it. They didn't want a man too close to us: that's the way I feel."

This might be so or it might not be, and for all we could find or learn, there were as many shades of feeling on the subject of the abdication as there were minds who thought about it, but it had the virtues both of a certain shrewdness and of being the only thing like a consistent or persistent feeling that remained after the

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dust storms had subsided; shrewd, perhaps, because it anticipated the future when the monarchy, like everything else in England, must either be placed on a wider base or suffer the natural extinction of all rigid forms. For however unnerving the spasms of loyal American democrats before the confrontation of a smiling, pleasant royal head, there remained the whole question of the monarchy in England itself. If it were allowed to "freeze" into a caricature of its possible usefulness as a fusing point for tradition, history and new forces at work, as John Graw and other of our neighbors believed it was doing, then its present vitality was less real than many supposed; was, in fact, largely a matter of injections in the blood and forced drafts under the old fires. As such it could neither be dismissed by the thoughtful observer nor given less than its due; only the effort to keep it as rigidly apart and traditionally separate as ever was revealing. For any new impulse or elasticity in the old system would have been drawn to it and directed toward it, immediately. It would change and grow into a new tower of strength for those who sought new things for England or it would serve as a mere remaining rock on a hillside for those who discerned in the fixed, stratified underpinning of British paternalism and conservatism the fissures of a wide landslide.

And certainly—to turn to other facets of the same deep-lying matter—nothing we had heard from middle- or upper-class lips told us that they had ever been recon-

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ciled, even in memory, to the Labor government which was the only alternative to the National government which held the scene in our time. To a vast conservative group, for whom Mr. Chamberlain remained a god through all his headstrong blunders and grew more god-like when it was observed that even the Olympians have their headaches, this had been simply one unforgivable lapse or break in a great tradition. To them, and to their wide following among the shopkeeping and commercial classes, there was little if any difference between an announced Socialist and the devil. Even Mr. Baldwin, despite his pipe, his uncreased trousers, his reassuring features, his eighteenth century weekends and other pleasant resemblances to Sir Roger de Coverley, seemed to stand much too far to the left of even an eighteenth century bucolic picture, probably through his association with Mr. Eden, who had been contaminated by a visit to Moscow and had never openly repented.

A certain hostile, deeply irreconcilable mood, a deep distrust of the future wherever, whatever it was to be, a feeling that only by squeezing, cudgeling and browbeating the clock backward could old England possibly be got back into her old color and frame, was the thing beyond every other thing that kept the Chamberlain group in power. Whether or not this nostalgia was justified is not the question: the question was its force and presence. It gave to the entire confrontation of England on a world of quick, deadly change the mute, stony expression of a

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sphinx. Its hold on England was such, at the time, that one was forced to wonder again and again, even reluctantly, if it was not a strangle hold.

For before our eyes stretched all the long signs of a past, still of magnificent gloss and coloring—London with its gray winter stillness melting to bright spring color, its pageants and processions, moving through grooves and channels of smoke-dark architecture—all the combination of inherited things, time-hallowed and sanctioned things that go to make the charm and persuasion of England to the susceptible American of today. Was it spirit or habit that kept things this way, and was there not a difference, a deep, vast difference, between spirit and habit?

No one could deny reverence to things that other people revered. When you enter another man's temple, if it is the custom and you are decent, you take off your shoes. But did Englishmen love these things, the signs and symbols of their ancient progress and order, or did these banners and symbols, once alive and full of active life and meaning, now hang there dead in a soundless air? Was it the mark of a deep satisfaction with their own rules, laws, institutions and sovereignty or was it the lack of a vital and satisfying curiosity about other institutions around them? Everywhere we looked, the clockhand seemed to droop.

A leisurely, complacent outlook around us which would deny an evil rather than face it, might listen one day to political speeches reiterating the strength,

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unity and striking power of the empire, the health and vitality of England, and the next day avoid an account of the malnutrition of English children or an editorial on the decline of the colonial empire, "a story of waste, neglect, improvidence and dereliction unexampled in modern times," to quote a London paper of the time. It was better, it seemed, to believe that all the new conscript militiamen were very fit, fitter than ever, than to realize that the army had suddenly dropped its standards in an access of something like propagandist alarm. It was startling, revealing, and whom should one believe? The politicians or those uncomfortable people who said things no one liked to hear, who went out to the big cities or to Jamaica and Trinidad and made official reports the government tried to scratch over as best it could? Neither in England nor in the empire itself, leaving the self-governing dominions aside, were the masses of people getting a living on anything like an adequate modern scale. Would anything be done about it? We thought not, and those thoughtful Englishmen most deeply concerned about England's future also thought not.

You cannot have your cake and eat it, nor your complacency and the troubles of empire together, and it was trouble that England was now avoiding at all costs, at all times. Up until the new war, no statesmen in power in our time in England had ever risen to that plane of common sense where it becomes apparent that peace and a

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long life, to say nothing of health and progress, cannot be bought or preserved without struggle. The successive betrayals of Abyssinia, the Spanish people (behind the veil of "nonintervention"), Czechoslovakia, the efforts to buy the goodwill of aggressive peoples by the betrayal of their weaker neighbors, were natural and logical results of an attitude, philosophy and state of mind that could only in the end achieve the fall of empire as empires had fallen before. Was it simply the fatalism of the very old—of those to whom death is an ever-present emergency blotting out the contours of vigorous life? Often, consulting the phenomena around us on the Sussex farm and farther afield, we thought this was true.

In England and, shadowing forth from England, over the empire was a spirit that made for the decline of all great things, until the war set an end to the enigma of England as we had seen it and raised a new one—England and the future.

Sometimes the more distant signs and portents of decaying empire sounded to us, and to ears around us, like the faint, far-off thunder of ice packs breaking in the spring.

They had no more real effect than that. What seemed to us still more revealing was that they were treated merely as everyday, natural phenomena. They might come, those distant reverberations, from Bombay, Ceylon, Hong Kong, from the West Indies, Jamaica or Trinidad.

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The sharper the warning sound the more muffled and evasive the response. Something like revolt was sweeping over the British colonies close at hand; fanatics in places as far apart as Trinidad and ancient India were stirring the flames. Would there come a time, even without a world war, when the ancient, slumbering island world would be ringed about by the smoke and embers of its once-vast imperial effort?

The Government Committee on Colonial Affairs, stifled since the war, submitted its report in the summer of 1939 on its investigation of empire affairs and the *Evening Standard* analyzed it thus: "It is the tale of the plight of a great assembly of peoples equal in number to the population of Poland, Czecho-Slovakia and much of Eastern Europe beside. It is the record of the devastation that has been allowed to sweep across 2,000,000 miles of territory. . . . The plaintiffs are the 55,000,000 citizens of our colonial empire. When Britain wrapped around her the mantle of imperial dominion, we undertook the responsibility for the care of these people. We have failed. We have made of our empire a slum."

16. **A**LL THIS WAS DEEPLY INTERESTING, and as we sat day by day in our small laboratory in its crumbling but still stout frame of the past we thought that it was of vital interest and concern to Americans far away from us, in their own homes, in fields and villages and cities which these things reached only as dim whispers from a portentous present they had not the means to understand.

For the hand-picked men of the American democracy in diplomatic posts in England, and the hand-picked intelligences of the State Department in Washington and in the White House, were seeing one sort of thing and we another. Who was right? The "classic" England of textbook-minded folk was there, but it was fading; it was fading so surely that acute Englishmen were afraid. It was fading so surely that plain, unimaginative English people were puzzled. And if our diplomats abroad and our best brains at home saw any puzzle and loss deep under the grass roots of English things, they gave no sign or symptom of such knowledge.

We saw in an effect of coming and going ambassadors, of well-managed and pleasant royal tours, in the vigorous determination of American diplomats "to get on" in the society to which they were accredited and land the best fish for their diplomatic tables, a keying up of American

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foreign relations to assumptions that no longer held very true. If England needed support today, democratic support (and it certainly seemed to us that she did), she needed it at just the democratic level that diplomats never reached. If classic England was to be fished out of the pond where her classic rulers had landed her, and set up again beyond threat or question as the mistress of the seas and the first bulwark of American defense, it would need men with sharper hooks and longer lines even to reach into the pond. English character alone, what it was, what it wanted, what it really believed, presented a first-rate problem to American diplomacy. England spent immense efforts in exploring the American political hinterland and picking key men for key positions, while American millionaires were enticed from their offices, fitted into striped trousers, told to buy a glossy hat and a dispatch case, and sent to England with a social directory and a guidebook in their hands and with a State Department thesis prepared for them.

So we were left uncomfortable in our little laboratory and rather alone. What we should have liked to see was a long lean Yankee chosen for his brains, leaning over the back fence and exchanging comments with John Graw, who also by his brains had picked himself out as an intelligent spokesman for a great mass of silent, acquiescent people on whose shoulders the roof of England would crash, if and when it did crash. Then we thought England and America might paddle over their differences and

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their real problems and arrive at some kind of sensible adjustment in their common perspectives on the world. A man taking a walk, with a knapsack on his back, stopping off at industrial towns, knocking at cottage doors, could learn much more about England in two months than any hingeless oddity trundled off to do the proper thing in a triangle between Portland Square, Downing Street and Buckingham Palace gate. He could learn where support, honest American support, should be given in England; and he could also learn that honest support of England in her great post-Victorian decline implied a depth of support, a degree of support that needed complete knowledge and an utter sense of responsibility.

The peaceful life in Sussex had turned for us into the long watch in England. . . . It could not be otherwise; every piece in our detailed wandering, our close scrutiny of the surrounding villages and fields, fitted into that pattern of things slipping a little out of hands that did not understand them very well. The England that had turned from a rural agricultural and maritime nation to create the Industrial Revolution had outlived the era of her own revolutionary and creative force. The ancient warehouses of London that had stored goods in transit for the Hanseatic ports, the ancient countinghouses of London that had picked up the discount business from Italian cities and learned to finance the world, the ancient fields that had supplied England's needs, our own ancient farm in

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Sussex, were all of one piece. The great towns and cities of the North with their trailers of fog and soot lying far and wide over valley and upland were all of another piece. Between them there had been vast struggle and a long reconciliation in the powerful Victorian age. And it was this age, and this alone, that most English things and many Englishmen were completely reconciled to.

We thought that, if it had been otherwise, in four long years we should have seen it. We saw, or thought we saw, in a hundred signs, symbols, day-by-day manifestations, that England today, having invented her own great era and filled the world with her fame, goods, and power, now stood in relation to her own past almost where France had stood at the end of her own great era in the days of the later Louis'.

What lay before us today in England, outside the limits of our preindustrial world, was a vast industrial spine, ruined in part and in part still very active, with its surrounding fringes of parks and great waste spaces, which began with inventions scattered over a fifty-year period before the Napoleonic Wars. It was then that the old mirror of England, the placid green face, a fragment of which we still lived on, had changed; it was then that the land lost its savor for millions of Englishmen, driven off it and huddled into the formless, chaotic, squalid towns that sprang from the earth under the impulse of coal and steam power. Armed with this new power and all it implied, England had beaten France in the Napole-

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onic Wars and cleared the seas to send the products of that new age over the face of the earth. So that the world we had grown up in as children in America, in many respects so queerly like the village in Sussex and especially that part of it where Mr. Jenners and Mr. Flack held sway among implements our grandmothers had used, was peculiarly and in part an English world.

We belonged partly, still, to this world. In us, as the seasons followed each other in Sussex, the prestige and in some part the enchantment of England was still skin-deep. In most Englishmen, even of the intelligence of Graw the cattleman, it was bone-deep and ultimately decisive. The England that had become the world's first workshop and expanded along the routes of her export trade, fastening deeply everywhere to whatever mattered most to that trade at home and finally taking to herself one-fourth of the habitable globe, had also its missionaries at home and abroad. We, too, were part of that immense Victorian culture; its articles were our articles, its books our books, its rhymes our rhymes, its embattled heroes in India and Africa our heroes, and its faith, to some extent at least, ours. We could measure in all our life and many of its activities in Sussex our own effort to wrench ourselves free and turn inward and backward an impartial glance on so much that was so deeply a part of us. We could feel in our hearts the crushing blunders of English diplomacy in the modern era as in part our blunders and disasters, until month by month, in the

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silence of our laboratory, the effort to keep clear about it all and impartial had become almost an obsession.

What did it all add up to? England, having done her great work in the world, was not progressing but relapsing behind the façade of her huge accumulated resources and accumulated prestige. Yet the effect of English success for a century and a half had been so stunning as to leave its mark and imprint on every Englishman and on one-quarter of the earth's population. And now it was tiresome, it was fussy, to be criticized or to criticize oneself, or to try to detach the present from the past in a world that offered so many daily problems born right out of the past. It was tiresome of us, with our better-class neighbors, to wander afield in the derelict towns of Wales and the slums of London when there still existed Yorkshire dales and moors. It was tiresome, and we felt how tired that old world really was, to think of these things as matters that only an English intelligence could see through or muddle through. We knew it and persisted and were criticized for thinking out loud about problems that were best left unsaid. England would show the world, we were told; England would do her stuff again. That that was precisely what we were hoping was something of an irrelevance. On the face of the young, redheaded butcher boy when he came to deliver the meat after the defeat of Tommy Farr by Joe Louis was a scowl that resented our typically American aggression and was meant to show that a time would come . . .

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Well, we couldn't care who licked who in a prize ring, but we did care about the somberness that clouded every English sky as people looked up trying to measure the future. It was insupportable, it was ghastly, for them to think that the sky of a centuries-old supremacy would drop, but there was still a belief in miracles, English miracles. Almost everyone had his own individual miracle. A miracle had been in Mr. Baldwin's pipe until in a mysterious way he upset it. A miracle was in Mr. Chamberlain, an old man suddenly given wings in his old age, a sky-and-father deity, until his wings turned out to be a broomstick. Miracles were in the English press every day and, in the absence of any real news those days, also signs and portents. Astrological papers redoubled their circulations and ouija boards, laid to gather dust in the cupboard since the last war, were out all over the place. A miracle resided in America, which with one twist of a monkey wrench could fill the skies with friendly planes and wipe out the effect of German rearmament. An American miracle man called almost daily in Downing Street, waited on the fringe of Cabinet meetings, and, apparently, kept the long-distance telephone in the White House humming and buzzing. But the two of us did not believe in miracles. And as the air chilled and darkened around us after every shock of new crisis in those long, drizzling summer days of 1939, we found even less faith in them than before the horrible, drawn-out days that had preceded Munich.

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For we saw in the hearts and minds around us, and in our own minds as well, a problem of incalculable tension, intensity and vagueness. Men and women would someday have to face the problem in all its cold, ruthless nakedness and be told that what they were being told, and had been taught to believe in, was manifestly wrong. Englishmen would have to be told that England no longer dominated the present era except by virtue of her accumulations of an era that was spent, and that her sinews in the present era were slack. Englishmen would be told this day by day, hour by hour, in the catastrophe that was imminent all through those drizzling, heartless days. Englishmen would have to know that the force England could put out in the world, though great, was as compared to the past a shadow force, a dwindling force, and her leaders, though not always insincere or foolish or headstrong, were but shadow leaders compared to other leaders England had known.

The long light of the Victorian sunset that lingered over England's industry, art, drama, architecture, literature, standards of living and health, had not yet departed. But Americans, as well as Englishmen, would have to fix their new horizons in the afterglow.

Part IV
The Victorian Afterglow

17. **W**HAT ALWAYS PUZZLED AND ROUSED our apprehension as we watched these things at work from our remote watchtower on the Sussex farm was that curious English insistence that, though these things, in sum or substance, could not be denied, there was still some peculiar magic in the English air that would see old England through, even without aid from the world outside.

And certainly no one could glance down the long and vivid chapters of English history and deny that in the past this spirit had been a source of miracles as well as of great tragedies. There was a case, and a good case, to be made for the English "genius" in its workings in the past. The thought behind it seemed to be that at a strolling gait and with the use of only his left hand any Englishman could accomplish more than two Continentals at a run and using both hands. How effective this spirit had actually been could be measured by the enormous prestige, even vogue, that it had enjoyed in the past. The habit of mind that goes with good, loose tweeds and a fishing rod or gun under the arm could never be dissociated from the traditional background of European diplomacy. Even the Nazis, or Goering at least, could not do without a hunting lodge or two.

The pure magic of the English spell all through the

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Victorian age was such that, as in the eighteenth century no petty princeling of Europe was complete or happy without a miniature back-yard Versailles, so in the later period when France had receded and England loomed large, nothing was quite perfect that did not have an English label and reference number. Whatever ambitious dreams the statesmen of the Continent went to bed with, they woke in the night with an awful apprehension of what English diplomats were doing with their fishing rods. The whole weight of their invincible Victorian progress lay back of this; no matter how a British statesman floundered or stumbled, the weight he carried was quite enough in itself to carry other things down with it. The habit that slowly lodged itself in the mind of England that a British diplomat's stupidities were worth twice over the cleverness of an opponent was a natural growth. A certain bisonlike appearance attached itself to British diplomacy in foreign eyes. No one had ever successfully matched thoughts with a buffalo. He might not be a clever or flexible animal, but what tricks he knew were all a piece of him. He might be turned or twisted, but when the time came, there he stood, planted foursquare, his legs running down like earth-sockets into the four quarters of the globe, his head lowered, his small slow eyes blazing. It was enough, magnificently enough.

A strong English dislike for anything "fancy" also stood back of this. The more plain and blunt a man was the more chance he stood in politics. Many English min-

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isters had aimed to win the Derby, but not one in history had been known to fix his eyes on a Nobel prize. Englishmen in responsible places with brains or technical knowledge hid them. It was safer; what nobody saw need not disturb them. Almost the worst charge that could be leveled at an English statesman was cleverness or complete capability in his own field. How deeply persistent this legend was in British politics could be seen by the treatment accorded to Winston Churchill by his own political party all through the dangerous days before the present war. Whenever he rose, as on the occasion of Munich, to predict the exact course of darkening events, he was slowly, quietly pushed down again. This profound distrust of a man who dared to think and utter what half the world already knew caused headshakings throughout the country and made the thin hand that wrote the editorials for the *Times* shake and quiver with official indignation. Mr. Churchill was fouling his own nest. With what? With the truth. But what a dreadful thing, and whoever believed in it? Confidence, in the English understanding, did not grow out of cleverness. Better, far better, a discreet old fumbler like Chamberlain, who when he muffed the ball did it in true British fashion, of whom it could always be said that if he slid to home plate on his nose, at least it was a plain English nose.

It was this habit of entrusting important things to men who did not grasp them that the Nazis counted on in their rapid rise from the time of the Hitler revolution

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until the war. Great Nazi exploits, such as the invasions of the Rhineland and Austria, were always, at the beginning, timed to the English love of long, quiet weekends in the country. By the time this habit had grown to be a joke in the eyes of the rest of the world, English ministers in power were just beginning to grasp its implications. That was in itself revolutionary. For an Englishman gives up his habits only when he sees the end of his world.

No one who had enjoyed, as we had, the leisure, the amplitudes of English life, could complain about this long lingering of an older spirit which alone and in itself made them possible. To divorce an Englishman, whether a statesman or a plumber, from his sense of leisure, of the day's division into the thing that is work and the thing that comes after work, rest, play and leisure, would be as impossible and in a sense as undesirable as to improve the condition and capacities of a cow by cutting off its head. Without something of this spirit and the background it implies, England would be shorn of most of its charm for outside eyes, most of its pleasures and small dignities, and what is more, England would cease to be England or Englishmen Englishmen. Yet in so many ways this system, a relic of those greater Victorian leisures which many people today view in retrospect with nostalgia, works to its own great disadvantage. There is no way in England today of getting things done quickly or efficiently. There is no way, not because the tools in many

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cases are not there, but because the spirit or perhaps only the time sense is lacking. What is done quickly, in the American sense efficiently, is consequently often done without the necessary bolts and rivets. The telephone system and the road and transport system are in reality only shadows of really first-rate and up-to-date systems as American and Continental people understand them.

The habit of standing level with and meeting eye to eye a competition that turns out unfavorably to them is not an English habit. It is a Continental habit, and a notion of how much greater in their liveliness, resource, and clearheaded appreciation of the world as it is today are the French than the English seizes instant hold of the traveler on the short trip from London to Paris. The adaptations of the French to changing conditions are innumerable; the adaptations possible to the English seem almost nil. The sense of a way and manner of life and all its accompaniments, fixed and ordained for all time, hangs like a dim fog over the island kingdom and in men's thoughts about it. In such vital manifestations as art, industry, health, or simply preparation for emergency, the English spirit, compared to the French, seems dead or, what is worse, completely turned in on itself. The oppressed consciousness, the deep uneasiness, of many thoughtful English men and women in the face of such a condition seemed to us the bitter fruit of an old neglect. The grosser facts of this condition come out in the inability of the English mind up to the war not only to face

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such facts honestly, but to accept what they imply in any healthy remedial spirit.

Even in the field of sport, the terrible pall that would follow the whacking defeats of the English players at Wimbledon seemed to us an unhealthy thing. The habit of mind induced by a background of being first in everything simply could not see England reduced to eleventh place at the Olympic Games without finding excuses that ranged from the preposterous to the pathetic. Instead of looking deeply into the real causes of their losing sport event after sport event—the general health and vitality of their own people impaired by generations of unhealthy living and malnutrition—most ordinary Englishmen preferred to see some disagreeable qualities of their opponents. And where it was an American victory, there went up either the old cry that the American professional attitude spoiled everything or that other most unfortunate charge of unfair play. Never by so much as a word or a sign was the thought admitted that another nation might be coming to supplant them in their own field of excellence. Not until the English transatlantic plane took off, with the aid of a refueling plane, to carry mail across the ocean in the middle of the summer of 1939, when two American planes had been plying back and forth with full passenger and mail loads for weeks, was it generally conceded in our village that you might send a letter across the ocean by air.

That the dread of being exceeded in anything was

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growing to be the most formidable barrier to any kind of English progress was being held constantly before our eyes by a thousand instances large and small. A habit of thought, predicated on a world that had almost completely vanished, still held deep sway on the island consciousness. It was one of the most singular, remarkable and striking things about England today. From such a root as this, the boughs and branches bore off almost everywhere within our limited horizon.

18.

WHAT MADE ALL THIS SO INTERESTING to us on the Sussex farm was something that lay behind whole broad questions of youth and health; it was the curious effect of haphazard and improvisation in so many modern English arrangements. Reduced to its simplest, barest terms, the proposition was this: If a thing has to be done, let it not be done too well lest someone think we have studied the matter. It made one often reflect, gazing or wandering about in England, how much closer England was to the early days of steam and sail and oil light than it was to the modern world. In spirit, of course. Granting a pace that was slow enough—timed, one might say, to the mid-nineteenth century—or a job that had been handed down a long time, or a job that did not require the ultimate expenditure of energy, England could always make way. Given a job that had to be planned a long time ahead, that depended on a great number of people all knowing their parts in it to the last degree, there was always some loose cog. There were loose cogs all around us, in air and home defense, in the simplest matters of A.R.P. Most of the government's measures, after Munich, including the steel shelters, struck a great many people as a peculiarly ill-timed joke. There were, for another example, at least fifteen different kinds of road, of all degrees varying from a four-track highway to

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a double country lane with grade crossings and blind corners, in the sixty-mile stretch of main highway between Brighton and London—one of the most heavily traveled roads in England—when we came to settle on the farm. It was, in the light of other modern motor roads we had known in America and elsewhere, a common deathtrap throughout whole long stretches, and its toll in accidents and deaths, year in and year out, was enormous. Yet in all the time we were there no one seemed to have either accepted or consulted the problem as a whole or said to themselves of this road or the other roads of England: "We have accepted the motorcar. It is a modern thing, a new way of getting about. Let us build roads suitable to it so that our people may not risk their necks every bank holiday of every summer."

That would have been one way of doing it and the whole thing could have been accomplished, judging by our own standards of road making, in something less than a year. But it was not an English solution. The solution was to do it in pieces, three miles here, four miles there, shooting back again into the old bottle necks, grade crossings, blind turns and ditched embankments. This must have been a very old phase of the English spirit, we thought, at grips with the thorough demands of large-scale, fast-paced living. The work that was begun on a ten-mile piece north of us was still going on three years later. The same A.A. scouts and flag signalers were shunting the traffic about up board planks. The amount of

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nuisance was intolerable, the amount of fuss and danger was worse.

Farther along, in Croydon, they were always picking up the same piece of road and laying it down again. Often, getting about in a motorcar in modern England, we felt as Dickens must have felt traveling by rail and stage and canalboat in America during his famous journey. Our journeys were not so famous but often bumping over the lovely, incredible and dangerous roads of England, that have not changed so much as anyone wants to believe since stagecoach days, we could feel that the pendulum had swung back with a vengeance. And it added to neither our comfort nor our satisfaction to feel so.

For in simple conditions like this, we could not help reflecting from the vantage point of our refuge and watch-tower in Sussex, there was a great deal of unapparent but very unpleasant danger. Least of all did the English spirit, that accepted all this so complacently as the right way, the British way, like to be nudged, poked or reminded of its slumbers. The quick flare of contempt for anyone who dares point a finger here or there or pry a nose outside the beaten accepted track for noses, is one of the hardest things a good-natured alien has to stand up under in England, and the source of untold failures of the English mind to come to grips with itself and its essential world of today. What is expected of the well-bred foreigner is that he should be brilliantly adept in glossing over English failures so that they appear as brilliant suc-

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cesses and at the same time avoid the subject of anyone else's successes. He must be prepared to show how poor and dirty France and other Continental countries are and how trains there never run on time. He must see (if he has Tory neighbors) how much better a place Italy is where old Musso has made the trains run on time and how much better old Spain will be when old Musso helps old Franco to wind his clocks. His eyes, avoiding the frequent and quite fertile mire of old England, must look over the fences into the abominable degradations of all who are not of England. Especially if he is an American and anxious to be friendly and honest, he must be told where to get off.

That was all right and, as far as we were concerned after some years near the Sussex village, we were having no more of our Tory neighbors than they of us and were learning quite without excitement when to slam our own door before getting our toes pinched in other people's gates. But our interest in the sights and sounds around us could hardly stop short with that. After all, whether educated and well-bred people shunned us, or were fatuous or patted us on the head, did not alter by one jot what England was or was not in the world. We might shiver at times at the fate of many good-natured aliens who come to England in a mood of trust and retreat in a mood of cold horror, but we were neither retreating nor having any of the horror ourselves. One look at Barker perched high on his cart grinning happily up at

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the spring clouds or waving his pipe across the field at us was enough to dispel anything like that. You could not waste time with horrors and shivers while living a neighborly life with people like that. You could only go on and watch and consult and reflect, giving the hostility and contempt of the average Englishman for everything not blessed by the shadow of his nose exactly its due, as a measure, a limitation, a danger in a world where many things had to be learned quickly, especially by Englishmen, sketching in the details, adding up the totals, fitting the picture of half measures here to half measures there, of the shabby slum villages of Wales to the shabby slum bungalows of Peacehaven, of the great depressed and stagnant area of the Church of England to a stagnant bewildered foreign policy, composed of half measures and evasions, of the decayed teeth of England's children and the half-vacuous, generally guileless but usually querulous face of England's youth, looking toward the future.

And here, in this prime matter of health, as in almost every other prime matter, it often struck us that England was only waking up to realize that one can always wake up too late. It was an old, old subject, the health of England, and a sore, sore subject too. To see anything at all, one had to get to the root of it. How far did the root run down? To the eighteenth century and the Industrial Revolution at least.

The everlasting damage done to population pulled off

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the soil and herded into surroundings of unimaginable degradation, under working conditions of unimaginable bestiality and remedied by successive patchwork throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, must actually be seen today to be believed in or widely credited. The stumpy, weedy, malformed children of the Welsh and Midland industrial centers have at least a century and a half of malnutrition and impoverished, broken heredity behind them. It does no good, we could never see the good, of referring such problems to comparable conditions in America or elsewhere. The method of meeting such criticisms as outsiders bring to bear on the facts of English life is usually by way of counterattack, but this is silly and stupid. As soon as one sets the American and British cultures side by side, to compare them, one loses the good of the whole thing which is their natural, living, complementary value. It was no direct credit to the American system that masses of people should have within their immediate reach better food, light and air than masses of British people. The thing was just so because the things were there. Not to admit it was merely to close your eyes.

And seeing these things, the question rose quite naturally: How long could the British economy hold together in any race for survival? Were these people, who always chose to look on themselves as chosen leaders in the world, really chosen for anything but a limited period, one might say, of their expansive life outside or their

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healthy life within? All such questions, which we were so often given to understand only bespoke a certain impudent self-assertiveness on the part of Americans, were really most valuable indices to our countrymen at home. It would take twenty years (according to the dental profession) of miraculously good circumstances and a perfect national diet even to begin to fill in the gaps in the mouth of England which served for teeth. Well, then. But was this more or less of an interesting guide and index to England and English civilization than the spire of Salisbury Cathedral or the nave of Peterborough? Was it more or less a symptom of what England really was that her champions should come in eleventh in the Olympic competitions or that she could build a hundred *Repulses* and *Hoods* and *Nelsons*? Was the unproductive dead level of English art and theater today a measure of a vital people exploring new paths for new conquests of the spirit? Was the general dead level of English health, so low, in fact, that the danger was that people mistook it for normal, anything but a path for flat feet to go limping into the future on?

Studying these things at the close range of the Sussex farm, the spirit again came forth, and it was the spirit that mattered more than or as much as the facts. It was not, as we sometimes reflected, that Martin's children, before he came to work for us, had had to do without milk and butter and fruit. It was also that no one in

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Martin's family or environment had ever been allowed to view such things as anything but inconceivable luxuries reserved for the rich and well favored, and not for the lean. What had worked in times past when gold from all over the world was pouring into England in return for a great exportable surplus of manufactured goods, when it didn't really matter how malformed or weedy the lower classes were so long as they could perform their limited functions at spinning wheel or factory, in restaurants or shops, or fight the battles of empire abroad, was now no longer workable at all.

Whole villages in the West Country were still without any water except for the town pump. No doubt this helped preserve their age-old picturesqueness, but that was not the point. No country in Europe, including Italy and Spain, was so backward in the matter of rural electrification. Less than fifty miles from London, and only eight miles from the chief seacoast resort on the south, electricity, that most taken-for-granted of all the conveniences and satisfactions of modern living, was outside the reach of all the cottagers around us and at least half the inhabitants of the village. Seeing whole families in cold, damp houses collected around a single lamp or candle in winter for economy, was also, perhaps, picturesque. But remembering the faces of similar folk in the light, warm houses of Norway and Sweden always put a question mark after the picture. The inhabitants of the

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center part of the empire on which the sun never set still moved about, in enormous parts, by medieval shadows and candlelight. And the diseases engendered by the damp, heatless houses in an age when the heating problem had been perfectly well solved elsewhere were only second in order to the diseases encouraged by a totally inadequate diet.

It is a fact (British Health Services Report, 1938) that the empire which owns one-fourth of the earth's surface cannot feed one-half the population of England alone. Fifty per cent of the people have some form of malnutrition: first, because they cannot afford essential foods and, second, because they do not know what are the essential foods; among the group appearing on the report of undernourishment are people with an income of \$5,000 a year. We knew in general what people ate in restaurants, we knew what was served to us as guests in people's homes, but the diet of a nation cannot be fairly tested by restaurant or party fare—if it could, the conclusion would be that Americans exist exclusively on chicken and whipped cream. So we set about learning the day-by-day meals of those around us, and since they were standard and seldom varied, an adequate appraisal was possible.

It was working people and the children of working people in whom we were particularly interested, since the future of a country rests primarily with them, and we found that the daily diet of the *employed, rural family* in

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the time of peace and plenty which was soon to end ran thus:

BREAKFAST: Tea, porridge, bread (with margarine)

DINNER: Meat, potatoes, a vegetable when one was up in the garden (this meant, except in July and August, cabbage or Brussels sprouts)

TEA: Tea, bread, jam, sometimes cheese

It explained a good deal about English health when you realized that the children were having no milk (except that "dash" in their tea), no butter, no fruit, no green vegetables except members of the cabbage family, and it puts an end to the inevitable wonder of foreigners about the appalling state (or lack) of teeth in England.

After the Conscription Act went through during the summer of 1939, there was published in the papers a typical day's menu in the army camps. It was:

BREAKFAST: Porridge, liver and bacon, tea

LUNCH: Steak and kidney pudding, canned peas, new potatoes, prunes and custard.

TEA: Bread and butter, cake, strawberry jam

SUPPER: Cornish pasties (meat pie), tea

This seemed to be considered rather a dietetic masterpiece and pretty pampering since it included meat three times a day and butter for tea. Perhaps it was and, since we are not experts, it may be ideal to build up young men for drilling and marching and fighting. But we continued to feel uneasy about the preponderance of meat and

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dough for lads of twenty who have been underfed and misfed since birth. Nothing, of course, could give them back their teeth at that age or could counteract the inroads rheumatism had already made, but we thought perhaps something a little better could be devised to improve what health they possessed and to give their unborn children a better start in life.

Going up the income scale a bit, we found welcome additions to the working-class diet in the form of lettuce and tomatoes and a sprinkling of fruit. And there was that phenomenon of the past four years—the appearance in every inn or hotel breakfast of a dish of canned grapefruit as a beginning to that traditional meal—an innovation, “an American idea,” and one we regarded with a good deal of awe. There hardly exists a foreigner who can be prevented from an intensity of expression on the subject of English cooking, but that has no place here since our concern is with what the English eat and not how they prepare it, and the fact that shocked us was that the British are rated in Europe, and by their own experts, a third-rate, or C, nation physically, but that so far nothing has been done about it.

It is true there was a fitness campaign in the winter of 1938-1939, but that consisted of courses of group exercises, and as Lord Horder, the famous London doctor, pertinently asked, what is the use of giving physical jerks to people who haven't enough to eat or the vitality to get through their daily work? The solution has to go further

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than the immemorial English one of "a good, long walk," which may work in the case of a bad liver but which we have seen unsuccessfully tried for rheumatism, appendicitis, and influenza, and if England cannot raise an adequate diet for 45,000,000 people on her home soil, there remains the one-quarter of the globe that belongs to her on which to draw. There remains also the problem of either securing empire produce at prices within the reach of English wages or of fixing English wages to enable English working people to purchase empire produce. And finally, there is the no less difficult problem of teaching their own people what foods are necessary to raise a third-rate physique to a first-rate one.

Housing became inseparable from this question of England's health, and to our eyes it seemed to embrace the lowest standard of living in Europe that we had seen, though we had not seen the Russian peasants, nor the ghettos of Warsaw, nor the homes of the Rumanian mountain peoples, nor our own sharecroppers. But taking the homes of the middle classes and the working people, and leaving out of the picture for the moment the slums, we felt that the root of the evil must lie in the English love of the soil so that the emphasis was on the garden rather than on the house. And a secondary root lay in a climate that never gets cold enough to freeze a man to death except in rare, legendary winters. The lack of proper heating, the English feel, can therefore be elimi-

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nated as a direct cause of death. What it did to their constitutions need never be faced under the aegis of that comfortable English statement that steam heat is unhealthful and that they don't like it anyway. We met that on an inspection of one of the vast new blocks of flats in London built to house five thousand people removed from condemned slum dwellings. After noticing approvingly the great wide windows to bring light and air to people who had lived so dankly before, the well-proportioned rooms, the modern bath and the kitchen with gadgets, it was with something of a start that we saw a small iron grate in the living room, saw that what we thought was a boot cupboard in the hall was a coalbin, saw that the floors of kitchen, hall, and bathroom were of uncovered concrete. By that time we had five English winters behind us, and we could see the new flat as it would appear, tenanted, in November: the state of those concrete floors when the children came in from school through the mud, after the mother had filled coal scuttles from the bin and carried them to kitchen and living room. We knew what it meant when working people had to heat their own flats and their own hot water. Four people, \$9 a week income, coal \$15 a ton—it meant they got along without heat and without hot water and they would sit in their new high, wide rooms with the shining windows with a raw fog outside that cut damply to the marrow of their bones and look ironically at the fine modern bath and the living room grate and at the white

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gas range in the kitchen with the slot for pennies above it. We also thought of the handsome new brick walls of the building itself and of the wallpaper and ceilings inside and wondered what just two years of rain, fog, and winter and summer damp would do to them.

Timidly we asked the proud young manager of the flats about central heating and he laughingly said that all the Americans asked about that. The answer was that the tenants had never had it and didn't like it. Non sequitur though that was, it had the ring of finality. Standing in the spacious concrete foyer shivering on a rainy day in July, we had a frustrated feeling, as if someone gave you a Paris hat when you owned nothing to wear it with but a pair of B.V.D.'s. And at that time we did not pause to imagine what it would be like with a war on—the price of coal risen, the price of gas risen, and the innovation of electric light stymied by a perpetual blackout every night.

The young manager concluded generously: "Perhaps we wouldn't have so much rheumatism, though, if we heated them."

What can you do about a people who have never had heat and don't like it, who will stand anything, who will shiver nine months of the year and stay cheerful, who will live on a diet everyone else in the world knows is unfit for human health and prefer it, who are so proud of their own shortcomings that they defeat their own superb qualities of courage and endurance and tolerance

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and remain doggedly third-rate physical specimens in the face of a war, whether of nerves or actual combat or economics? A people who pay not the slightest attention to the warnings of their own fine doctors and scientists, with no thought for the future, no thought for the present, and who say flatly that this is the British way of doing things?

We always thought of our first summer in Sussex when we went to the village chemist to ask what they did about the excessively hard water of the district. "We put up with it," he said. We went elsewhere and bought a water softener—but then that was the American way.

19. **T**HESE WERE THE KINDS OF THINGS that brought us up sharp whenever we tried to grapple with those matters which no Englishman likes to remember of his country, just as no American likes to admit that American children have died of malnutrition in the face of the greatest plenty the world has ever known. But because no American ever thinks of them when he thinks of England, seeing always the lush green fields and the orchards and the flower gardens, they seemed to us to have a direct and vital bearing on our own picture. For the passing of the great era has filled England with as many unsolved and seemingly insoluble problems as the setting sun leaves shadows in a forest. And it would do no harm, we thought, to go along a little further down that track, this time in the wake of a *News Chronicle* reporter in the summer of 1939. The scene, in this case, is the Poplar district of London, between the Commercial Road and the river, near the East India docks:

The tour started in Hamburg Mansions where the tenants have been on a rent strike for twelve weeks because the landlords will not reduce rents or do the repairs.

There are twenty-seven families in the "Mansions." The flats there have neither sinks nor running water. About one hundred people have to share four sinks on

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the public landings, while there are only three lavatories to over seven families.

Come into Mr. M. Izzat's two-roomed ground floor flat. It is a June afternoon, but the living room is as dark as the gloaming of a mid-November eve. When your eyes become accustomed to the darkness you will see the paper peeling off damp walls, broken windows blocked by sheets of cardboard and the filthy, decayed skirtings of doors out of which bugs crawl.

Your feet sink into a sponginess of dry-rot, and you land on a sheet of rattling tin. This tin, as well as pieces of a chest of drawers which Mr. Izzat has knocked to pieces, covers the crumbling joists where half the bedroom floor has fallen in. Six-year-old Charlie Izzat, a pale-faced little fellow, is crying on the bed. He has just had six teeth out, is recovering from an outbreak of ulcers and has got nasal catarrh.

Actually you are seeing the Izzat flat at its best. At its worst, when it rains hard, the yard is flooded two feet deep, almost up to the window ledge. Then the plumbing becomes stopped up and Mr. Izzat says he cannot eat for the smell.

A Ministry of Health report made prior to the Overcrowding Laws, shows that in recent surveys made by the local authorities, about 430,000 houses, including tenements, were found unfit for human habitation and another 340,000 were crowded beyond healthy capacity. In some cases whole families in these overcrowded buildings were living crammed into one dirty, unsanitary room. The survey did not include conditions in Scotland, where poverty and general human misery are even worse. It did

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not list conditions such as this, quoted from the Reports of the British Health Service for 1936, but which were general in some of these hundreds of thousands of human "dwellings":

An area is mentioned which has a density of population of 905 to the acre. In another case a four story tenement contains sixteen houses with access by a common entrance, then by stairs to the flats above, and then by common lobbies to the houses. The defects consist of broken wall paper, worn floors which are loose and off the level, sagged ceilings, loose and worn window-sashes, dampness, darkness and bug infestation. One of the tenants complained that the bugs dropped into the food. The wife of another tenant gave birth to a child in a bed which the district nurse stated was literally moving with bugs. Another one-roomed house contained box-beds with earth floors harbouring snails below. This house had no water closet and the windows had to be nailed shut. Nine persons inhabited it including a woman in an advanced state of tuberculosis. In another block of ten houses containing 58 persons water was obtained from a tap at one end of the block which when it was turned on took half an hour to fill a pail. The only sanitary arrangements were two privy middens.

No one who knows the England that lies far afield from the tourist on his strolls in Mayfair or the Wordsworth country would say that conditions like that of Mr. Izzat are "general," and yet no one who knows England and cares enough about England to give an honest ac-

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count, and no honest, observant Englishman himself, would say that they are unusual or exceptional.

For the vast, stagnant pools of population that have collected under the debris of the once busy and now lifeless industrial belts of England have formed reservoirs of degraded life whose depth few can plumb and into which no decent man can look today without horror and a sense of deep foreboding. One has to have been brought up with those conditions and then to have carefully avoided them to be able to view them with the elasticity and equanimity of a Conservative politician in Westminster. Nine cases out of ten it is because none of these slum inhabitants has ever heard or dreamed of a better way of living, has been brought up to view a sty as equally fit for a pig or a man, that he accepts his condition with dumb apathy and even some cheerfulness, chiefly on Saturday nights. One might say that where there is no exorbitant imagination at work there can be no exorbitant misery; but if this is a good half-truth, it is still a dangerous one, for it is these people who carry the germ of the future, and it is their fate which has infected deeply and tainted the whole atmosphere of the future in England. It is their condition, more widespread than any politician would care to admit, that shows clearly, unmistakably, how far the old industrial activity of England has broken down, to what an extent, as in some stagnant pool lost in the depths of a forest, the waters—even the old muddy waters of Victorian prosperity—have ceased to run. It is

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the habit of mind of viewing these conditions as in some way God-sent and God-ordained that most frightens the foreigner when he tries to work out for himself the future of an old system living on its past capital and guarding its investments so carefully. For even in their efforts, and they have been formidable and consistent, to build a new life out of this wreckage, the English seem to be beset by a peculiar fatalism and to ignore causes when contemplating cures.

We could come back from our strolls here and there about England, from such expeditions as the one to inspect housing, to the quiet of the Sussex farm, and see again how much of this greater world mirrored the little stagnant, picturesque world in which we lived.

So much of England was in spirit, if not in fact, like the Clifton estate, an old, grooved, charming estate, but one whose chief properties leaked water through their roofs. We did not ourselves mind the leakages in our own roof since we could afford to patch them and we developed a kind of ingenuity in dealing with insidious drains, hand pumps, drafty chimneys, and oil lamps. We had lived long enough in various parts of the world to know that there is a catch in most things, even in the House of Tomorrow with its moto-controls and dishwashers that do everything except wash dishes. Furthermore, it didn't always rain, it wasn't always cold, and if you can get a good man to help, what do you want with

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an electric switch that will cost that man his job? On the other hand, if you cannot afford any assistance, then the assorted miseries of house-running in England pile up into great dingy threats; they get in your hair, they ruin your disposition, and they have in them the germs that breed insanity, apathy, dirt and despair.

When a roof leaked in the manor house, the butler ran with a bucket and all was well or passingly well. We should have been less than shrewd observers of modern England if we were unable to understand the act as symbolic and also symptomatic. So long as the old high arch and vaulting of the old authoritative way of England stood, or could be patched or glued together or made to appear quite strong from the outside, no one really cared. No one, that is, in our own local atmosphere who counted for much or whose word was accepted as standing for much. If the drains didn't work, neither had grandfather's drains worked and grandfather had lived to be ninety-eight. The normal expectation of life, among those who actually survived damp, disease, rheumatism and boiled cabbage, was still somewhat longer because there were less things, including less "convenient" things, to worry about. Except among certain kinds of bungalow-living folk of the lower middle classes, there was little "keeping up with the Joneses"—in itself an enormous relief. Therefore, so long as the glue held out, or could be passed around, there was no great need for changing things; and,

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after all, if the old horses could still pull the cart, why change horses?

The very best opinion ran in these directions and the sharpest of the best opinion also admitted that England was not what she used to be. It was often strange, and sometimes a little stunning to outsiders, to come up against a state of mind in England that envisaged the defeat of England before the battle was even joined. Part of it seemed a reflex of the ill-concealed or openly admitted Tory admiration of Hitler and Hitlerism for its masterly efficiency, its authoritarian way of keeping its own people in hand, Mr. Chamberlain himself complaining bitterly that the dictators wouldn't tolerate such criticism as came his way after his actions at Munich. The other part of it was the more simple manifestation of people the world over who believe they can rely on their pocketbooks in any final emergency. England, to this candid way of looking, was not only an island but an empire, and many Englishmen, and all the best of them including those who had written up English policy in the past five or ten years, had investments abroad. To some of them, who had traveled, the old island was getting a rusty look anyway; if worst came to worst and the old ship went down, they could still make out in some colony or dominion abroad.

What struck us most in our estimate of this opinion was not its infrequency but its vague, sticky prevalence in the atmosphere around us, as though there were many

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more ears than we had supposed listening to the old clocktick of England and wondering about the clock. Since empire was their business, and England only a part of empire, what about the other parts? The opinion of the Englishman on the boat we met returning to Sussex in the winter of 1938-1939, that a new imperial capital should be established in Los Angeles where he lived and had a Buick, that America would easily slide back into her place in the imperial structure if urged and old England herself could be patched up like a sore thumb, was a rather fantastic exaggeration of this mentality, but the best minds spoke outright and openly of Canada as the next seat of royalty, Parliament and empire administration, since by no count could a member of Parliament or his property be held safe in London today.

This opinion did not look forward necessarily to a complete defeat for England or a Nazi landing and invasion after a totalitarian bombing spree, but to a state of breakdown, an anarchy that must inevitably follow any too long drawn-out conflict within England itself. It was speculative opinion, it paused, drew deep breaths, looked around for reassurance the way a man will before buying heavily of some very speculative stock. Also, in the manner of some stock plungers, it took no account of the larger human factor. The theory behind it seemed to be that the larger population of England, if England failed or suffered a heavy reverse, would have to be marked off the books sooner or later anyway. England was being

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taxed to death as it was to support an enormous "surplus" population. If the industrial machine, creaking badly through loss of proper lubrication and sufficient markets, ever completely broke down, England could hardly support more than a third of her present population at an extreme pinch. England existed and existed only on the strength and by virtue of her foreign trade. Let that be cut off, and collapse, anarchy, starvation were as inevitable as next day's sun or rain. And the colonies would hardly be likely to welcome 25,000,000 surplus Englishmen or know what to do with them if they got them.

Brought up ourselves on the myth of the final invulnerability of England, the doggedness of Englishmen who could make their muddles as they went along and always pull through to the other side, this state of mind whenever it revealed itself came as a complete shock. For if it was true, or anything like true, if all that some people thought of was "ratting out" if things got too hot, what of those simpler sorts of people around us who had been born and bred with the idea that those on top always looked out for those below? In all the prevailing breezes of those peculiar days in England up to the war, this breath of a miasmatic defeatism seemed to us to afford the least consolation to us or to anyone who had looked abroad into the small homes and hearths of England, and from that and no more than that still had faith in England left.

20.

WE COULD REFLECT ON THESE THINGS and still see, returning to earlier considerations, that if the real condition of a nation is to be judged by the uncomplaining patience of its people, then perhaps what we were witnessing around us on the Sussex farm, in the village and elsewhere in England was still the simple fulfillment of old laws. For of all the efforts in the world, that of putting oneself in another's shoes is the most puzzling and difficult. We could not put ourselves in the places of the thousands of Mr. Izzats, Butts, Morgans, McDermotts and their families who inhabit the rotting tenements of the rotting towns of Wales, the Midlands and Scotland, nor of those other Izzats, Butts and Morgans who had been raised to higher things in council houses and council flats. We could observe and take thought from the observation how often the worst sorts of fates in England were tempered with the cheerful countenance of an ancient equanimity. That almost startling clarification might reveal itself in the most unexpected places, under the meager lamplight in the lost lonely streets of some Welsh mining town, ascending and descending the ruin of its blasted, pockmarked hill, between low leaden houses squatting against the night, when suddenly out of nothing, out of shadows and darkness, forms grew up around us and cheerful voices set us again on our road.

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Perhaps more than anywhere else in England, the shadow of the past overhangs the gray present in those grimy, work-beaten streets out of which even the ghost of work has slipped possibly forever. Yet the absence of envy, resentment, any upswinging life in the face of that long death-in-life that waits for the inhabitants of hundreds of gray towns in hundreds of huddled, formless, treeless valleys touches the heart with a terrible pathos, and touches also something deeper, a wonder as to what this silence really conceals in its acquiescent depths.

For a thousand ruts, grooved by time so deeply that even the attentive observer gets no more look into them than an airplane observer into a city street, carry this strange, sluggish life along its own arteries all over that part of England that the tourist never sees. Within those voluminous and dingy chests of drawers which are the great cities of London, Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Glasgow, which between them hold more than half the entire population of Great Britain, are recesses, indexes and files of life that no one has ever had the time or the spirit to look into. The Cockney streets and the Cockney life of London, with their strange customs and superstitions, form jungles grown up in the dense centers of civilization less known to well-bred West End people than the jungles of Africa or the pampas of the Argentine. Not one Englishman in a thousand knows the weirdness or one-half the eccentricities of his own island; its narrow limits in themselves and its vast congested

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places have been enough to force life back on itself to produce forms from the grotesque to the terrible. One must press not through one but through a hundred curtains of fog, soot and smoke to come face to face with the labyrinthine jugglery.

Life reduced to its drabbest will find its compensations, and the traveler today, his head full of history and glamour or research in some dusty library, sees the ancient classic engraving on the coin of England, now a little battered by time, but of the coin itself nothing at all. Even to us on the Sussex farm, the number of eccentricities we met in our immediate surroundings was startling. There was Lady Busk, who terrified the grocery clerks by pounding her cane on the floor and swearing like a navvy, and her two masculine daughters whose bold stares and menacing swaggers unnerved the village maidens. There was the retired gentleman in Wortle Lane who walked out with a red-coated goose on a leash, the young lady who claimed to have been bitten by an armadillo at the zoo, the middle-aged woman who couldn't go upstairs alone at night in a cottage the size of a bird cage. And farther along the coast, near Rye, there was the old man with the spyglass, duly elected every year by vote of the parish, to walk upon the cliff and watch out for Napoleon's fleet.

These and a hundred other eccentricities in the atmosphere around us bore constant witness to the wonders that really lay within that green Pandora's box whose lid

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and sides are all that most people see of old England. Possibly the most puzzling mystery to us was that of sex, of the relations between men and women. It bewildered us time and again and we never felt capable of understanding it, for it was not enough to tell ourselves that the culture of England has always been and still is a masculine culture. The contrast between the sartorial smartness of men and the general drab, down-at-heel appearance of women is a superficial index of this, and the gaucheness, the emotional and mental immaturity of many well-bred English girls compared wholly unfavorably with the poise and conversational facility of their public-school brothers. They seemed to us to have little in common when they were young and to be content to reserve any comradeship for old age. Men talked down to women not with the implication that their pretty little heads ought not to be bothered with important topics, but that they were too dumb to understand them. It made women seem as they were in Greek times, accessories after the fact, the fact being the reproduction of a son. This is a situation that cannot be blamed exclusively on either sex, since it appears to be the fault of both, but we felt that Frenchmen had not cultivated their women and Englishmen neglected them for nothing. Much of the future vitality of the race is wrapped up in this question and yet most Englishmen still regard it as an unwarranted, even an unnatural question. So, feeling unable to comprehend it ourselves, we gave it a historical

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root when in the purely masculine pursuit of empire building men relied exclusively on men and the Spartan training of the public schools had a point. Now, the purpose having gone, the pattern still existed to work out its results in various less pleasant designs of loneliness, boredom, incomprehension, fatuity, and neuroses.

It would seem to have been left to the lower working classes, where mere poverty is often enough to produce real co-operation, to reach a more human and humorous level in these affairs. Wherever men and women co-operated actively in their life struggles, as in the cottages around us, a hearty and heartfelt relationship could always be observed.

One might say that our village, and our surroundings outside the farm in a more or less densely thicketed area of "Colonel Blimps" and pensioned civil servants, was thin ground on which to base any sweeping generalizations in matters like this, but we could not concede this to be anything like a valid reply. The usual answer to Americans in England who dare or attempt to call attention to anything loose or misplaced or even trivial or sad within the old island framework takes two directions: the first to call attention to other worse and more glaring defects in the American system, and the second to hold up the person who makes it as a typical example of American ill-breeding, completely without the perspectives and background necessary to understand such solid and virtuous things as are everywhere to be met with in the British

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Isles. Even the remark that, like anyone and everyone else, the British may have the defects of their qualities cannot be admitted when it comes from an "outsider"; what is necessary, first, is that he should be completely absorbed, riveted to their own background and completely integrated before it is assumed that he has any right to speak or reason for speaking. This, as we saw and believed, was an unfortunate thing; while it may be quite and completely true that the only people who understand the North Pole are the bears, seals and Eskimos, still to require a person to become a seal in order to have an opinion on Greenland is farfetched. The most valid testimony on the arctic regions has not come from the Eskimo, and to say that England, in its deeper aspects, is not an arctic region to most Americans is quite to miss the point of what Americans have thought it worth while knowing of England in order to "polish off" their literary and guidebook experiences. The cry of "being misunderstood" is thus not a wholly valid cry on either side of the Atlantic; it might equally well be advanced by the tribes of the Congo against the work of the anthropologists, and observations of Hakluyt on the habits of the penguins dismissed because he was not a penguin.

What interested us greatly and continually were traits and characteristics; it did not invalidate our interest that such traits and characteristics as are sometimes discovered by Americans with an itch for other things than old world

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quaintnesses in England are usually tossed off as irrelevancies. If, for example, the prevalence of the retired civil servant type of mind was remarkable enough in England in our time to exercise continuously the pen of England's ablest newspaper caricaturist, Low, it did not seem to us that it could be tossed off the English shoulder with such a gust of petulance and irritation as greeted Margaret Halsey's equally able rural caricature. If anything at all, we thought, the irritation rather reinforced the inadequacy.

And to call attention to the imbalance and frigidity which seem, again to the outsider, to enclose the sex relations of a great part of the island, on the upper level, in a special cell apart, was not, we believed, to advance a special case. It was a subject, as we believed, more for tragedy than for comedy; it was a subject which the young village doctor, when he came to call in the evening, was continually enlarging on, even to the borders of the most consummate fantasy.

Perhaps we were wrong, or perhaps we were right, in trying to piece this picture together with the picture of our village in any of its more unaccustomed exertions, such as the crises, the air-raid precautions, the evacuation of the slum children from London, called forth. As to the air-raid precautions, in which we participated vigorously and pleasantly, against the generally recognized background that where nobody knew anything at all, a good

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deal of fun could still be derived from nothing, they were a case apart. The patriotic lady who marched straight up the downs to the place where she had been ordered to wait until the stretcher bearers and ambulance men picked her up, and died of pneumonia from exposure while waiting, was also a case apart. The parts assigned to us at rehearsals were usually those of corpses, partly because it was never generally known by the officials or ourselves whether aliens could take more active or responsible parts. But stretched out on the village roadsides in the drizzling darkness of the mock blackouts, with our legs carefully drawn out of reach of the buses that brushed and blundered past like huge bats and moths, we had ample time at least to reflect on the local version of preparedness as reflected downward by an immense paternal machine, at least as blundering and blind as the things we guarded our legs against. Neither the rector nor the Squire nor the doctor could be budged from their dinners on these occasions. It was left to the greengrocer, the ironmonger, the farm laborers, to improvise as best they could and this they did with spirit and gusto, although with nothing more than old handkerchiefs by way of bandages and an old truck or two, of a type and age guaranteed to break the backs of any casualties incompletely shattered by bombs, by way of ambulance.

In London itself, as we learned, things were at a still lower ebb, where people in Poplar and Chelsea tene-

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ments were led out of their houses by wardens who indicated the chalk marks on the pavements where the government would provide shelters when it got around to it. This state of affairs, coming eight months after Munich, when London was defended by ditches in the park and some forty antiaircraft guns with their sights missing or mixed up, and one month before the outbreak of war, may have had its humor; but to thoughtful people, unlike the rector, the doctor, the Squire, the Prime Minister and other instruments of government, it had its terrifying possibilities as well.

Who was making money out of the government-provided steel shelters for the tenement people was always another burning question. They weren't much good, although several goats and a scientist had made an essay of testing them under actual bombing conditions; and when they were delivered the bolts and rivets to fasten them together were not to be found. Undoubtedly as a solution for the problem of excess raw materials they were useful; but housewives in Birmingham had to stage a demonstration before the City Hall to get them removed from pocket back-yards and alleys where they were simply dumped and became at once a grave problem for people with no room to turn around in anyway. Still they were free: a paternal government was doing its best, and if they couldn't be set up in cement-paved alleys and courts where there was nothing to fasten them to and no earth

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to throw around them, as the law required, that may have been the fault of paternal governments three hundred years ago for allowing cement alleys and courtyards to be built. No one had any better solution for it. In fact, no one had any solution at all.

21. AND NO ONE, IT SEEMED TO US, HAD ever remarked sufficiently that it was in just such social groups as the retired schoolmasters, clergymen and Indian civil servants and officers, and their widows, tied to a narrow and dwindling margin of security, loaded down in England by a rigid necessity for "keeping up their end," fixed dully in a pattern of narrow respectability, that all sorts of the weirdest superstitions flourish. With nothing to fall back on, with no resource in themselves, such as the commoner sorts of people have for turning to this or that, their lives are hemmed in by their neat garden walls and by the small fears that are their nightly nourishment. It is groups of people like this, better educated and lacking entirely in that intelligence which a wider experience of life gives to ordinary working people, who have always been the most fertile seed ground for all sorts of social phobias and panaceas, fascism not the least of them. It is on their narrow shoulders that authoritarianism is always hoisted into power, since the only power they wish is the one that can continue unchanging the conditions of their security. It was these people in whom the hysterias of the crisis months showed themselves most violently, to whom the *Times* proposal to hand the Sudetenland over to Hitler registered most deeply when it was first delicately hinted, who formed the solid bulwark of

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support on which the National government of England was able to move from Abyssinia to Munich, and who showered on Mr. Chamberlain the adulation usually reserved for those who have served their country, or only civilization, well.

To all outsiders and to most Americans this power, latent in a class of people least adapted to wield it or do anything but act as a great drag weight on progress, comes over a period of time as a distinct and unpleasant shock. The influence that spoke most loudly through the successive dangers and crises of recent years in England was not the voice of the Opposition, not the voice of the surviving remnant of the older aristocracy, including Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden, not even the ghost of the Old Squire, but the voice that we so often heard around us in respectable small homes, the voice of bank managers and pensioners, of colonels and headmasters, of civil servants and decayed gentry, of all the bungalow-living, small-car and single-servant type of being whose rather unsightly villas or imitation rural cottages have completely ruined enormous tracts of otherwise lovely English countryside.

Nor had it ever occurred to us until we were brought close to these people that, whatever the conception of the British Empire abroad, it is for them and their leaders simply a dividend-paying proposition. If it had, it would not have puzzled us so much or so often to see the heads of British government in times of acute world crisis act-

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ing simply as company directors whose sole concern is their stockholders, nor to have noted that any rise or fall, say in Kaffirs or Johannesburgs or Egyptian government bonds, could immediately bring such influence to bear as to paralyze all broader considerations.

That this type of mind, achieving its truly preposterous expression in Mr. Chamberlain, should have envisaged safety, security and continuity as something to be bought and sold in an anteroom after closing of exchange, at the expense of other people where practicable, was not perhaps remarkable. But that the psychology of the green table and the directors' room should have pervaded the greater part of the responsible mentality of England to the almost complete exclusion of other mentalities, at a time of world emergency, seemed a condition of grave concern.

For through all the drizzling uncertainty of crisis and wobbly, unbalanced recovery which led straight to the war, it seemed to us that to judge the actions of the British government abroad except from the viewpoint of the responsibilities of the directors of a limited liability concern, engaged in making profits for its more powerful investors, was simply impossible. To accept this as one's definition of England and the empire was simply to open up its greatest weakness, as a top-heavy, overcapitalized business liable to all the diseases, reversals, failures and bankruptcies of any trading concern where no man's loyalty is deeply fixed beyond the fluctuations of his own in-

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vestment. To say that the empire was anything but a sterile interest to these people was only to say that they hoped it might continue to be a lucrative one. But to charge them with any responsibility, morality, honesty, loyalty, or vision, statesmanship or altruism was to miss the point of what England, under the crushing weight of these people, has in recent years become.

It is the static condition of this inner machine of empire and the minds that run it that puzzles the observer most, for after all it could not have been altogether like this in times past. Sometimes it seemed to us on the Sussex farm that these people and their dependents and defenders in the lower ranks of conservative society only existed as flies do around a diminishing sugar bowl. Perhaps some of this was true of all investor classes in all countries, but in other countries they seemed to lack the force, the inert power that kept them on top in England, relentlessly, persistently struggling to stay there at all and every cost. The narrow beak, narrow shoulders, narrow forehead of Mr. Chamberlain loomed as their figurehead. Here was a man they could trust!

Here was also a morbid condition, and if we glanced away from it hastily at times to the shrewd, open, reassuring cottage faces around us, no one, we thought, could blame us. For compared to anything as living as their own lower classes, even anything as vital as the ghost of the Old Squire, they were dead.

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So, much within the limited but increasingly active scope of our observation from the Sussex farm or on our excursions through England was the reverse of the tale of Aladdin's lamp. The more you rubbed, the less your wish to see was granted; the more you searched and the deeper you searched, the more involved and complicated the pattern of the roots became.

Why was it, for example, that in an island surrounded, as all islands are, by water, with the most inland spot no more than sixty miles from the sea, fish was a rare and expensive article? On a visit to the Yorkshire coast we sent back to each of our cottage neighbors in Sussex a box of smoked herrings. Not one of them, all living eight miles from the coast and a large coast town, had ever tasted such fish, according to their report. You could buy fresh fish in our village, but the price made it an extravagance that we postponed for major occasions. "Fish and chips" might be the standard lunch or tea for a large percentage of the working populations of the industrial towns who ate at the fish-and-chips shops, but to the rural inhabitants around us a good haddock was about as rare as a turkey. Fish was more expensive eight miles from the sea in England than it had been two hundred miles from the sea in America.

Small things like this were a cloud when we rubbed the lamp and looked about. Another was the matter we have already mentioned, teeth and general health. In a burst of something like frenzy, the Minister of Health had once

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remarked in public that "the teeth of England are rotten." This was a legitimate judgment, allowing that there were really teeth left here and there in England to rot. Eight out of ten people above the age of thirty had false teeth if they could afford them, and most of them didn't care. Dentistry as a recognized science has just begun to make a respectable appearance in England, at least fifty years too late, and children are now taught in school to brush their teeth. Furthermore, a dentist makes periodic rounds of the schools and pulls a surprising number of rotted baby teeth and shakes his head over the second teeth coming through already decayed. It brings you up against another of the enlightening remarks of Lord Horder that there is very little use in preaching health to people who can't afford it and it would take a good deal of answering by any politician.

It might interest the perfectly cold-blooded observer to speculate on how long the most enduring, patient and passive people can go on marching and countermarching through history under a system whose decay, so long unwitnessed, goes to the very root of life itself. The habit of pulling in the belt and grinning in the face of conditions that would drive a foreigner to the desperations of revolution is an old English habit. It is admirable in a sense, and in a sense commendable, and England is a good place for Americans who would like to learn how to face life patiently, calmly and stoically under hardship. Those old virtues of stolidity and endurance cannot be denied;

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neither can they be given a lower position in the human scale than more active, aggressive virtues.

It was an open question to us whether the blind, follow-the-leader instinct of so great a part of the English population was a mark of devitalization. Often watching crowds, as during the coronation ceremonies when the parks and even the great thoroughfares of London were turned into camping grounds and people lay stretched out on newspapers on the paving stones, we had to ask ourselves whether there was really the spark of anything but mass conformity in this vast huddle of unkempt figures and gray faces. People kept dropping down in dead faints all around us during the long procession, people who had stood for twelve hours with nibbles of chocolate for sustenance. These were abnormal conditions, but what we were witnessing was not abnormal—the patience, the orderliness, the lack of rowdiness, the good temper of a British crowd. If you want to keep your place in the queue for unreserved seats at a popular play in London, you hire a little stool and place it in line, and can then go off to have your dinner in peace and need not return until curtain time. Such a thing would be completely fantastic on Broadway, and to Americans the virtues of honesty, decency, of live and let live, the strains of courtesy and quiet patience than run through England are good things to see and live among. Where the blood runs slower, tempers are far less tried; taut nerves slacken

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as they should slacken, and time and the press of opportunity have less value.

In that sense England is a valuable place for overstrung Americans and they should have the courtesy to return what they have learned out of the courtesy and forbearance of a thousand people great and small. But they should know, too, that many English people look on the great slackening and inertia of the island life today with a profound and answerless sadness.

Part V
The Cracks in the Wall

22.

IN AN ISLAND IN WHICH MATCHLESS decay and squalor and matchless scenery exist within a stone's throw of each other and in which life goes its way in separated grooves, most things are separate and few things overlap. You do not have to see what you do not wish to see or what you will not see. The gray bulk of Windsor rising sheer from river and park, the dark majesty of Durham Cathedral set like a black rock against the ages and the winter storms, the lonely hills of Westmoreland with the stone walls laced across them seen through a shower of hail in March may be all the England that concerns you. The transformation of London's West End in spring from a place of intolerable cold shadows to a city basking in green and flowery parks, in solid, rich memorials of the past, may be enough. These channels are the deeper and richer because history has grooved them and tradition has colored them.

Living as quietly as we did, we could see ourselves in the midst of history, and what was that but the ever-moving stream of human consciousness and the testimony of human lips on the events that shape the future or by which it is rendered shapeless? We might stand on a public square in Edinburgh on a black March day in the spring of 1939 and listen to revivalists in red jerseys haranguing the skies, and to bull-jawed men haranguing

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the earth and the government, and see children with running sores and the great swarm of deformed, debased human life sprung from the gutters all around, moving and murmuring like animals outside a zoo.

Or we might leave those tradition-haunted channels of London life, Piccadilly and Whitehall and Westminster, those neat, leafy squares and houses with painted doors and bright knockers, and see the faces under the flaring street lamps, at the doors of pubs and the old dirty fish-and-chips shops in the Commercial Road. They were a great center of gravity after all, a pull on the life of a nation, and they were just as significant of England as any Sussex lane around our farm.

The canalized life of better-class England—how often it seemed to us to move round and round, a solemn goldfish in an ancient bowl, doing very little and that little not very well, pushing its nose against the glass at Ascot, at Lords, on Derby Day, solemnly seeing nothing and returning with a flick of its tail into its splendid rock arbors and underwater ferneries again! Yet this old world of glittering fish and some less glittering, some confined through all eternity to a dim life in mud shoals, could not be summed up in an adjective, could only be examined from all sides like a crystal.

We believed that the reverential attitude of traditionally minded Americans toward the majesty of England today was a bubble in the head. The majesty of any nation is a bubble in the head liable to the explosions of

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time and history and the simplest rule of thumb is to respect other people for what they respect in themselves. And the things we respected in England had nothing to do with Guardsmen's busbies or pink coats; they were connected with men like Jenners and Rand and Barker, men in a million, the once-solid spine of a system that was no longer so solid as its frontal appearance in history. So long as a certain kind of Cockney humor prevailed in London streets, one might even listen to a speech by Sir John Simon or the Archbishop of Canterbury or read the *Times* and still not utterly despair. So long as quiet, thoughtful men leaned across restaurant tables under the smoke of Manchester and calmly and pungently bespoke the evils that "this government" was laying up like clay bricks in a bank vault, no one had to believe that all of England that mattered rode up and down Bond Street. There was sense and sensibility, a good solid backlog of it, just where it belonged, at the core of things, just where Americans were most likely to miss it, and if it did not come to prevail, if somehow the mood of its utterances was one of despair, that was a cause for sadness but not for disrespect. If all England could do no better than follow after its Tory headless horsemen, its old bank directors and trustees, that was not just our despair but the anguish of many honest Englishmen.

The tenor of our life in England, apart from the deep speculative calm of wood and meadow, had gradually

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become a circumnavigation of difficult shoals between shocks of varying intensity. The question to be answered which no one and no single event in particular could answer was, which counted most—the shock or the calm? After all, English rural life as it may still be experienced in many parts of England seemed to us immeasurably better than any rural life we had yet known, and so much better than English rural society as to give the best of that, at times, a cheap and fading glamour. The deep identity of soil and character that has stamped the English scene with its own unique perfection is not to be reproduced readily—perhaps never at all. And it did not seem in any way probable that hereafter we should ever meet or live in neighborly fashion beside men of the stamp of Barker, Grimshaw, and old Roberts the shepherd.

But where, how or by what means were we to fix this picture? Every shock like that of Munich made it dance and dangle crazily against its greater background, the wall; and then studying the wall itself, its cracks and fissures seemed to run everywhere. How many shocks could that wall, let alone the picture, stand? The answer, rendered back to us solemnly by quite solemn English voices was “not very many.” No nation in history had as suddenly produced such a crop of native prophets of its own decline as England before and after Munich. They ran the whole gamut of English thought from Kingsley Mar-

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tin of the *New Statesman and Nation* on the left to the gloomy Dean of St. Paul's on the right.

Certainly, stretching out the record from Munich to the abortive attempts to fix up a Russian alliance after Prague—an alliance whose very contemplation made one well-known peer threaten to faint dead away in the House of Lords, and which spread fumes as of a tar barrel all over the editorial pages of the *London Times*—it seemed that the old hands at the spades were as steady as ever.

Such were the shocks of those days and so did the cracks and fissures appear in the wall behind the picture. After all, you could scarcely expect them to be clarified by people even more puzzled than ourselves. So many things had an acrid smell about them that nice people were either turning their heads away or simply reading the *Times*, where even the worst smell could be impregnated with a perfume all its own. We could turn our eyes from the pleasant fields around us to the macabre witch dance on the heath, but we could not do anything about it. No one could.

And there was another thing entirely outside the realm of witches and earthquakes, bound by the very nature of things to cause the picture to jump and teeter on the wall. Educated Englishmen and educated Americans do not really speak the same language, not in thought, although they may pretend to, until experience has refined and simplified them beyond the grasp of inherited prejudice—and that, in most cases, is never. People who have

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been brought up in a sharp-edged, quickly changing world cannot share the comfort or ease of mind of those brought up to believe that the best things are always static. In the beginning, we had had an idea that our sharp, changing world might have a value to this older, slower one, but that notion, we had to acknowledge after two or three years, was only wishful thinking.

The English child, taught to estimate all things as one or two degrees below his own scheme of perfection, grows into the Englishman who cannot change that opinion because he has no means of testing its worth or validity. The picture of the Englishman as the perennial globe-trotter and cosmopolite is rather a caricature, after all; an Englishman takes England along with him wherever he goes and resists fiercely nearly all foreign ways, so that often he is an even less pretty picture abroad than the proverbial American in Paris. But it should be remembered that until very recently, until the time of cheap popular tours and cruises, only the wealthy in England had the means to move out of their own circumscribed horizon. In our village we were looked upon as globetrotters because we crossed the Atlantic once a year and had in the course of fifteen years wandered over most of Europe. It would have been odd to have opened the heads and examined the reflections of the rural people around us on that land to the south of them, their "natural ally" across the Channel whose coasts were visible on clear days from Dover. We could never find any general decision

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that the inhabitants of that land were entirely human beings. We, on the other hand, were evidently more human because we spoke the native language, though in an outlandish way that the movies were beginning to popularize, and were therefore tolerable as colonials. We never successfully convinced the postmaster that we were not empire subjects, that the United States was not some kind of appendage to Canada sticking out to the south, and inhabited by a rather rougher sort than the usual rough colonials, together with numbers of gangsters and cowboys.

In general, this conception of the United States as a colonial possession with a quirk seemed to dominate the intelligence around us on higher levels as well as on the lower ones. The President was our "headman"; he occupied a position removed from the general village scrutiny but slightly below that of a borough councilor in London. His pronouncements were listened to as carefully as though they had emanated from Toronto. When he said the right thing, it was conceded that he was doing his duty; when some isolationist senator, like Senator Borah, spoke out in Congress and his words were reported, the indignation was great. Why didn't our headman lock up traitors like that? Did we ourselves really share the idea that America had a choice in any procedure that Parliament ordained? We did, and were accordingly disliked in some quarters and misunderstood in others. But occasionally John Graw reminded us that he did not blame

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us for distrusting English Tories because he didn't trust them himself.

Here was another cloud that misted over the picture whenever we turned from the earthquake and witch dances to the finer points of Anglo-American co-operation. American history, except for specialized courses, was not included as a subject in public schools and universities. Why? The answer, if correctly given, would go back to the roots of much that was strange, even eerie, and a little frightening to people with a profound love for certain English ways and things; it would also go to the root of much that was distorted and confused in Anglo-American relations. It was always possible that the English outlook in this as in other things was turned back on itself by a vision of things too strange to cope with. And yet it had to cope with them or suffer the fate that waits on blindness everywhere.

All that could be done to us by this general ignorance of places outside the limited horizon of village and farm, or of Big Ben in his tower over Westminster solemnly ticking out the minutes and hours of English supremacy in the world, was to isolate us over a period of time, and once in a while to make us curse our own thin skins for letting the pricks get under them. To wrestle with the mentality around us was to shout against a rock as fundamental to the English as Gibraltar itself. But were Americans, after all, so deft and tactful in their treatment

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of foreigners at home? How long had it been since an Italian was a "dago," a Swede a "squarehead," a Pole a "hunky"? And how often since returning to New York have we heard people here regret that there are so few Americans left, that all the office workers and factory hands and servants are "foreigners"?

In the domestic field, common sense and unbiased observation would bring anyone to the conclusion that there was less meanness, uncharity, and ill-will between groups up and down the old class society of England than there was in a society like ours, which after wrestling with all the laws of science, progress and invention was just beginning to wake to the dearth in its midst of loyal, simple co-operation and tolerance as the two things without which no life is worth living. To any American of average intelligence and goodwill, old England still had tricks up her sleeve, the greatest of them being the civilized respect, and occasionally the sympathy, of those on the stepladder toward those who held it to the earth. It was no earthly paradise, this farm around us where the men worked doubly hard when "the governor" was away to "have a bit to surprise him with" when he returned. But it marked a lingering spirit, a real fraternity between the land and those who lived by and on it. That was an honest spirit; it was a spirit that in America might be worth any dream of miser's gold. There were, too, excuses for both the evils we saw: the evil of blindness in England and the evil of inventive avarice at home, for it had

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not been so long since the only problems Americans were faced with were the felling of forests, the draining of swamps, the building of roads, while the English were a solid homogeneous race—what passed as good currency or good character in one man generally passed for all. They had cleared their wilderness centuries before ours was discovered, and other wildernesses and ruins had crept in, but there were still remaining great patches of still another kind of wilderness in the American soul and spirit that keen men would have to rise and grapple with if the American experiment were really to find its place in the sun and stay there. We could afford our blundering vagueness as to the aim and meaning of our lives, perhaps, and they, the English, the men and women around us, could not. Our blindness was a great misfortune; theirs was a fate, a trap.

It made them reckless when they should have been afraid; it gave to so many appearances of courage in the atmosphere of our time the tepid shallowness of bravado. Was it so wise, so courageous, not to have one's eyes open all around? The advice of the Psalmist, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard," could and should have been changed to "Go to the Nazis and learn." Off there in Germany was a great and contemptible viciousness, a violent efficient viciousness eating the heart and soul out of all Europe, but building, organizing like ants on a ruin. And who ought to know about it if not the English? Who would suffer from the collapse of Europe in a fine modern twen-

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tieth century version of the collapse of the Graeco-Roman world if not England? Who had seen its menace as intimately as the handful of English journalists who got into hot water with their editors by being frank about it? Why did it take a war to release the accumulated evidence of British consular representatives in Central Europe on the subject of Nazi atrocities, an accumulation kept private for years? Did or did not Mr. Chamberlain know that it was the custom in concentration camps to beat, starve and kick people to death before he went to Munich? Hadn't he read the official records of his own government? If he had read them, then the present moral indignation was just too late by twelve months. Did not the action of the British Tories during the last three or four years rule them exactly out of any court where they wanted to make a plea in defense of freedom, justice, democracy? Were all these things just high-sounding slogans? Then why not disavow them and get down to dollars and cents and empire interests and sound investments? That, at any rate, would wash in time and the other wouldn't.

The volume of detailed information pouring into official and unofficial Britain was enormous—and yet no one wanted to know. It was so much more comfortable not to know too much, not the truth at all costs. While England was resting on its spade, the Nazis were turning Central Europe into a fortified camp. For what? To keep British investors and Tory property owners secure? Many

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of the people to whom we talked thought so, and it was our misfortune that we did not. It was also a misfortune to say so frankly; it was not the thing to say among nice people. Mr. Chamberlain was not having thoughts like this; neither was the *Times*.

23. **A**ND WE COULD ALSO SEE THAT BEHIND the great fog, smoke and obscurity, the fine-mesh veil that hides from tradition-loving people the deeper movements and meanings within England today, whole broad battles were being waged in an atmosphere of aging silence and secrecy. The broader question was, who was to remain on top? The finer question was, how was a class system that had already shown great inner stress and weakness to maintain itself?

The larger lines of British policy, as they had shown themselves in recent years, were actually the product of group forces engaged below the surface in an atmosphere of intense dislike, hostility and suspicion. It would be difficult to estimate how greatly the present Tory leaders of England, under the Chamberlain regime, had been motivated in their larger actions, including their actions up to the present war, by fear and suspicion of their own masses. It was never difficult for us, remote as we were on the farm in Sussex, to estimate the real feeling and reaction of the commoner sorts of people toward their present leadership, for in that leadership anyone could see mirrored only too plainly the divisions within the class system itself. Or, as Mr. Priestley put it in an outspoken article:

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What we can be certain of is that wobbling and double-faced antics, talking one way in public and another way in the City, the Carlton Club and big country houses, can bring nothing but disaster. It has lost us every move in the game so far, flung away strategical advantages, ruined our prestige, and we cannot afford now to drop another point.

That was true, for from Abyssinia to Spain and Munich, the Tory leadership of England had flung away the natural defenses of England with reckless hands and we had been there to witness these losses and to share the wonder of the rest of the world about them. The moldering stagnation of the old class leadership of Britain still remained as a fixed idea in the consciousness of thoughtful Englishmen of all ranks. So much that carried with it real ability, and prestige built on superiority of knowledge and intelligence, had appeared to lapse and crumble in modern England that for the first time, perhaps, lower-class opinion was violently engaged in a battle against pure snobbery, against the remaining form of a thing out of which all content has vanished. What we and all observers living in the heart of conservative, rural, aristocratic England were compelled to note was the stiffening, hardening and drawing in of the lines of class defense.

This came to seem to us in the course of years one of the most frightening as well as puzzling things about contemporary England; so many tragedies through the Russian Revolution and the Nazi climb to power and the Spanish disaster had seemed to have a dark root in this

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stiffening and withdrawal of an old and responsible class into the narrowest grooves of its privilege. In no sense, whether we watched in Parliament or simply strolled in the country round us, did this symposium on defense of the old way of England seem vigorous or even mature. To judge by some of its actions, as in Abyssinia and Spain, it often looked like its own worst enemy. To judge by the faces and gestures of the younger Conservative members crowding the back benches behind Mr. Chamberlain, and their occasional speeches, it looked like a gathering of listless schoolboys. Looking down from the Visitors' Gallery in the House of Commons, it was impossible not to notice the disparity between inexperienced youngsters and stolid grayheads on the Conservative benches and to remember that almost the whole generation who should have carried the weight and responsibilities were lying underground in Flanders and Gallipoli. And from such considerations the mind roamed out again over the face of contemporary England.

What was it, we wondered, that the upper classes were trying to achieve? A kind of mute sterilization of their own ancient privileges? It seemed to us that the strain after "form," good form, and appearance, good appearance, had robbed form and appearance of their substance. What were we, what was anyone to make out of the inane, dull chatter of the Squire's son when he stopped to lean over our fence? To say that he was unusual was

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not to say that he was not typical, a little too typical of his class. Everything but the knots and ends of a few ideas, as hard and objectionable as gallstones, had been pumped out of him by a public-school education and a brief service with the Guards. He was not a bad fellow in any noticeable way, only a dreadfully harmless one, only like so many of the "best people" in England likely to put out his foot to trip up any idea that got in his way. One day he might want to know why it was that we Americans put up with such a lot of disorderly dagoes as the Mexicans on our southern border. Why didn't we march in and confiscate all their oil wells and mines? That, following shortly after the expropriation of the British-owned oil fields in Mexico, was perhaps a mere itch of the pocketbook, but his clear admiration of Hitler and the Nazis right up to the dangerous days of August was something harder to define. Yet it could be defined, perhaps, in terms of that queer upper-class education that takes English boys so young and stiffens them into set patterns from which there is little escape in after-life; that system which in the "good old days" when all the empire needed was a stiff upper lip had worked with such astounding results in many parts of the world.

Perhaps there was a pathos that we could not see (or were too prejudiced by our own training to see) in this blind clinging to top hats and tail coats in those great, beautiful, ancient rookeries that Americans have been taught to view as acts of special creation with no very

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clear idea that the age for which they were created has gone, as blurred as any chalk mark on a schoolroom blackboard. No one can walk today through such a place as Eton or Winchester, filled with the sere leaves of ancient memories and a youth that for all its nervous movements under its tall hats still looks thin and sere, and not wonder what they are at, what it is all for. Sometimes one is haunted by the notion that the struggle of respectable or ambitious people in England to give their sons a public-school education is a little like the preservative efforts of thoughtful matrons who put their linen in chests and camphor out of touch with the world.

Like the Church of England, the public schools grow on the mind after a while as a stagnant area, a backpool, reserved for such recondite uses as are no longer very valid. From them seem to emanate such lively flashes of life as those at the bottom of a pond, a sort of minnow life, or such a life as anyone may come on who reads day by day the correspondence columns of the *Times*. A queer, dusty smell, even drier and more deadly than the one that comes from our own preparatory-school catalogues, rises from the pages of such works as the *Calendar of the King's College of Our Lady of Eton, founded by Henry VI in 1440*. The reverential attitude is hard to maintain, although one learns that "Fifth Form Nants while bathing at Athens must get behind screens when boats containing ladies come in sight." What things well-instructed Nants, on the other hand, may do mostly con-

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cern cricket and Latin and Greek, estimable things, but things from which the sap has run a long time past.

We could turn all this over in our minds on the Sussex farm. We did not want England to fail. Because upper-class England, public-school England, was tactless and impolite and insensitive with colonials and Americans and foreigners, and sterile within itself, that was only a qualifying condition, not an absolute one. We were all right where we were and it was also all right that in the midst of so much that misunderstood us or got under our skins there was still that which needed, almost depended on us. What were a dozen mistakes of tact, courtesy, ignorance? On the face of old Jarley when he rumbled into Southampton in his ancient taxi to meet us whenever we returned from America there was something beyond tact and courtesy and ignorance. It was the peaceful recognition of men of goodwill toward goodwill in others when suddenly, after months of questioning, it has become completely valid.

Our life in Sussex on the ancient, crumbling farm had changed in time from a troubled crossing to a fair passage. The winds that blew our sails out were the winds that all men need to make a voyage out of mindless wanderings. The earth was a small, homely place, after all. What we had sought, and wandered so far in seeking, was no more than all men seek, a hearth, a fire. It did not burn in great causes or abstract things any more than it

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burned in great advances or scientific progress. It burned in just the little that men desire or need to make life satisfying at its root. It showed us how queer the world was in its long-enduring and persevering intolerance. It showed us that the only security men had in this world today was in the hearts of their fellow men. It showed us how, lacking this security, men may wander forever and die swollen on their own achievements, bereft, impoverished, in a glittering, menacing world.

Plain as the writing in an ancient book, plain as the text that lay on the field that Barker's plow had furrowed outside our farmhouse window, it showed us for what men are born, for what they seek, what they live and die for. Work to turn the barren soil to sun and rain again, and in the end the flower's slow droop and wilting. And peace that comes untested, unquestioned, a shower in a still, spring night. The knowledge men have that they are not alone, that from whatever part of the world they come, on whatever wind they are blown, only loneliness is unendurable.

Only time and the fruit and change of the seasons counted, and if all we saw lay in that direct relation to growth, seedtime, harvest and aftergrowth, it was the fruit of the years and seasons around us. The place from which we reached to bring things back was a part of England, and we were a part of that place. We were not pictures on some ancient cover, but part of the writing, and though the sum and substance of that writing might be a

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cipher, we could not be eliminated, quite. We could not be robbed of our vision, for our vision cared. We could be robbed of everything else in the world, but when we left that place, that farm, it would matter. And the fate of everyone on that place would matter, and the fate of England.

We could look at it this way and that way. If there was a wall around England, built by time, who were those who sought to break lances against that wall? We had heard from the voices around us that only Master knew best, and what if Master failed? Was there anything better forthcoming?

- Nothing short of an earth-shaking catastrophe could possibly loosen that age-old grip, that merchants' stolidity and bank directors' viewpoint from the credits and assets of England. But when their time came, though their fall might be great, no one could quite say what would come after them. The record of the Labor Opposition (His Majesty's Official Opposition), in and out of power, was not one that recommended itself to unbiased observers. If all the Parliamentary procedures in our time were a great symphony without a theme, then the Labor leaders were often soloists without flutes, or without the skill or the determination to play on them.

Such inexpert people as we, living on the edge of things on a Sussex farm, always came up against the most puzzling factor in the profound and anxious muddle that

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marked English political life in our time. Hundreds of people all over the world interested in England could ask: Why, after the stupefying blunder of Munich, which beside throwing into the hands of the Nazi hangmen the most respectable democratic country to the east of Hitler in Europe, with the third best army in Europe and fortifications second only to the Maginot Line, and falling back months later on an alliance with Poland which had no meaning whatsoever without backing by Russia—why, after a procedure pointing like a steady signpost back toward all the stupefying blunders of his own recklessness in the years of his office, was Mr. Chamberlain still in power? How, after arranging for his people a “peace in our time” that was to end after months of anxious and fearful preparation in war less than a year later, could Mr. Chamberlain and his close associates in power still hold the strings of the whole bag of tricks into which the fate of their country and empire had fallen?

Perhaps the wisest counsel to observers like us living on the periphery of things and trying to make a picture out of mists and seasons would be to pass it all up, since obviously there was little difference between not knowing everything and knowing nothing at all. Perhaps a great deal of what Mr. Chamberlain had done depended on calculations as cold-bloodedly neat as an astronomer’s calculations of the movements of the stars. In that case, all one should say was that he had miscalculated and that the words that had outraged and shocked our ears and

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other ears after Munich—"peace in our time"—were only the measure of an astronomical error, like mistaking the moon for the sun. Perhaps, too, we were wrong in assuming that Hitler could have been effectually checkmated at Munich and the war that would come after to end all war and preserve democracy was as unnecessary as any war. Perhaps a great deal of it depended on the fact that there were also French squirrels of that time up the tree shaking down nuts for Herr Hitler. Perhaps the French politicians had actually sabotaged a British effort for a firm front or perhaps the British had sabotaged the French. Certainly when it came to the final emptying of the diplomatic mailbags that had brought to Herr Hitler the conviction that he could stand and challenge the world, there would emerge the profoundest smell of sulphur and brimstone the world has ever known. But still the question remained, transfixing us and all who looked in on England in those days so rapidly approaching their culmination: Why was Mr. Chamberlain and the group that supported him, the group that had labels like the Cliveden Set, the Inner Circle, the City, still in control?

Sometimes when we thought about these things on the Sussex farm or consulted our more informed neighbors about them or discussed them before the fire with John Graw, we felt like the man in Conrad's story who, after fighting his way up the black river for the sake of the man whose image had illuminated his feverish days, had come on a derelict hope, a real heart of darkness, a

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flabby ghost. Was it actually the case that there was not in British politics any real source of strength because there was not that with which to check or compare a real weakness? Things happened, happened daily, happened all during the time we lived in England, that made the strength run out of joints and muscles, and there was nothing to stiffen them. Things like the abdication of Edward VIII, a horrid little drama in an anteroom filled with rubber plants, lace tidies, oratory and other Victorian pomposities, things that made us feel cold, made all the air around us dank and lifeless, made every voice from the upper regions the voice of a ghost. Little scuffles of betrayal, extinction, behind the thick, draped arras of *Times* editorials, while decent men in Abyssinia, Spain, Czechoslovakia, looked up and saw the blackened sun. Things that led one to believe that even if the conception of empire had dwindled to a matter of bookkeeping in bank vaults, the books were very old and the bookkeepers were thumbing them the wrong way. Things that made one surmise that if, among the blind, the one-eyed man is king, then among ghosts the flabbiest has the highest survival rate.

The profoundest wish of English statesmen of our time was to elude the responsibilities of statesmanship. That, also, was a ghost-wish.

But where was the other wish, the living wish to stand up to them? Again, it seemed to us to be concentrated in

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those ancient flying fortresses of the past who had known different days, those Lloyd Georges, Churchills and a few, a very few of their younger but powerless successors, who could still speak out from their experience in the mind and will of old England and whose words would carry over to the fatal day and beyond. "In all my fifty years of politics," said Lloyd George, "I have never known a worse government in England than the present." And the words were ominous to listening ears, for never in all those years had England stood in such peril, not only of her life but of her soul. It was there, the voice of the past, watching, warning, but never had a tent in a gale flapped so quickly to the ground as the force, the vital force of opposition after Munich. At times it looked as though those men of the opposing parties, those Attlees, Greenwoods, Daltons, had had delivered into their hands just what they had been praying for, striving for during the bitter years of the inner struggle in England over Spain, over Czechoslovakia, and having it, had also turned into the ghosts of their own convictions.

The gusts of vehement anger that seized the simpler sorts of people around us after the horrifying Munich ordeal were too much like the gusts of wind, scattered, spasmodic, with nothing to catch or focus them. The rages of many honest Englishmen before the repeated tragedies, dishonesties, revealed failures, treacheries and ineptitudes of a government of stubborn, fumbling old men were too much like the individual pantings of a thousand

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locomotives scattered over hundreds of miles of track with broken bridges between. The Socialists were not going to help them; the Liberals might and probably would, until Socialists suddenly began passing Liberals by on the other side of the street. The suddenly announced discovery of the Labor party executive that an old school tie smelled just as sweet whether you found it about the neck of a Conservative or a Liberal might be sound, but such a discovery during the most intense crisis of English politics since the Abdication was about as useful and helpful and justifiable as any remark or discovery of the Archbishop of Canterbury at any time or occasion whatsoever. The skill and persistence of the Labor party, lacking both leadership and cohesion since Ramsay MacDonald had been triumphantly taken into camp by the Tories, in evading its national responsibilities might be a seventh wonder of that particular period of English political history, but it could only produce an eighth wonder in the unutterable confusion and loss of millions of people who saw the one burning need of the day in getting rid of Mr. Chamberlain and his little inner, or "vicious," circle, as it was called, once and forever. No one could really suspect the Opposition of any great enthusiasm beyond that of seasoned political jobholders. Least of all could one suspect them of any real will or ability to stamp on the sparks that the Conservative government had scattered out of a somewhat dry tinderbox all over the surface of Europe.

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If there had ever been a time or an opportunity to drive the old money-changers out of the temple of England, it had come in the winter of 1938-1939, and the money-changers could sit back month after month and change "peace in our time" to preparations for a war that might destroy every vestige of our time, and quietly flourish and stay in the temple.

For no sooner was the Labor party given a real opportunity for opposing than it began opposing itself. A sudden spasm of heretic hunting ran right down the ranks. They were going to hunt not Mr. Chamberlain's head, but witches in their midst. To people deeply interested in the present Parliamentary working of England, it opened deep vistas of calculation and thought. Did these men, brought up and trained in the old inferiority atmosphere of a class society, really want power? Would they know what to do with it, which way to turn when they had it? Was not that old instinctive glance of England we had noted so strongly on field and farm, that glance up, that conviction that Master knows best, that without a master they can only wander and drift, back of a great deal of this? Was not the habit of civility and obedience, a good habit and one we liked, which made life easier for us where we lived and had so made life for countless years but was also capable of abuse like any other habit, back of a great deal of this? When we saw old Atkins leaning on his hoe in the fields, his blue, rheumy eyes following the pink coats dashing about the fields after

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the hounds, were we not witnessing an ancient, immemorial strength and weakness of England that in time of crisis, danger, like the present time, must also prove England's fate if it was not checked or changed?

If the men of the Opposition were content with delivering thundering verbal blows and nothing else, who could take over the slack reins and restore England's prestige and power? Left to themselves, the upper classes could only wear themselves out as every upper class had done at one time or another in history. Clear as any flash, one could see through the mists and fogs which the Chamberlain group had raised after Munich, and through the swollen, formless, inchoate Opposition fighting itself, the essential threat in English political life today, its fixity, paralysis and stagnation.

If men below could not rise and men above could not look ahead but must concentrate on keeping the power still in their hands, then in all truth England faced a dangerous future, darker after the war even than during it, a future of complete political stalemate that could not alter except by the explosions of revolution. What we were seeing in present England was no more the present than any instant that flows into the next to make the meaning and pattern of the future. The enormous problem of England today was not whether she could win a war and survive it, but whether she could change, whether she had that within herself to meet and outmaneuver the exigencies of time and of her own vast dead weight. She could build

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battleships, guns, and planes, hurl the whole huge force of her finance and rearmament against an enemy on land and sea and in the air, but could she do that without which no life form, plant, animal, individual or nation, survives? Could she change, and how?

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THERE, IN THINGS LIKE THAT, THE rim of our moving, shifting picture seemed to come to rest again against its deepest background; and its deepest background was the stagnation that the great eras of England, rolling back like a slow, receding tide, have left behind.

It is possible to live with stagnation and not know it. Men may walk and live amid decay and not know it because there is not that with which to compare their own condition. We could still live in the groping twilights of that fateful summer, watching the outlines of the old English mastery slipping and fading as the high green downs behind us faded into evening shadow and mist. All that lay ahead was a pit and the shadow of a pit; all that men could count on was time or the probability of their stumbling; all that remained to cling to were a few grass roots on the edge of a cliff. But people had not changed much. The village children had new rhymes about the "old umbrella man"; the simmering rages of honest folk over the facts rather than the statements about Munich cooled off slowly in the calm, misty vapors around them; the old bulwark of the largest navy in the world loomed uppermost in their reckonings. For us, at the end of each day's march was the old Sussex farm, aloof yet friendly in its wet, green fields. The skies were

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English skies and the men in white flannels on the oval were village cricket teams. As long as men rode and hunted, played football, or sat at their tea before a coal fire dozing over the cozy pages of the *Times*, not very sure whether it was today's or yesterday's *Times*, England was England, after all. As long as the same heart-rending, inevitable, soggy food appeared on the table three times a day, England had not changed much. As long as air-raid shelters were distributed without their nuts and bolts to people in tenements who had no place to put them, the Chamberlain government was still the Chamberlain government.

In our village, Mr. Jarley, the taxi owner, was having none of it! "They changes black to white and white to black, they chaps in the government, every other day. I've as much as I can do to get along with my own affairs. It's all talk and it comes to nothing. Why don't they tell us what to do or else shut up?"

Yes, there was the other side to things, the side of the quarrels and disunities that were shaking the old familiar pattern of English harmony to the core. "They changes black to white and white to black." For the first time Englishmen had become deeply apprehensive, not of the enemies without but of dangers and disloyalties within. The voice of a village taximan allied to the voices of bewildered journalists, the voice of John Graw, the cattle-man, speaking the same words as some of the troubled members of Mr. Chamberlain's own party, what did it

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mean? That a course had been set for England, and powerful hands were steering England, and that people who thought did not trust the course nor the hands. A Parliamentary system that could not raise a firm, united Opposition in times of great emergency—did it mean the crumbling of the whole Parliamentary system? A loyalty that tied men of the caliber of Anthony Eden to their party and their class and set their deeper convictions adrift—did it spell the end of party and class systems?

In times past England had been strong in emergencies because men, some men, had been shrewd enough, loyal enough, strong enough to push their way up above group interests to the control of affairs and of the general interest. That, beyond anything else, had kept the class system of England going and a thriving theory. As long as strong men, fierce in their convictions, could drive their way up through the Parliamentary crust, the masses of English people instinctively felt they were being represented. Many English politicians in the past had often known how to hold the eyes of England and the world; today none of them seemed to have that spark which can fire and unite. In the green-lit Commons now the strong old men on one side clung like limpets to each other and to their power, and across from them on the Opposition benches younger men, more intelligent men, clung to nothing except the fine invective of their conflicting beliefs. Underlying everything else in the English system was that deep instinct of the common people to look up

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to men and leaders, not to systems. As long as the leaders had appeared, as long as they spoke and rang true, and had in them the sturdy backbone of old England, it did not matter whether you called the system democracy, plutocracy, oligarchy. As long as you put runners in the field who could run well and fast, it did not matter what name you gave the race—it would sound as well under any name in history. The end was not the running; it was the goal, it was the confounding of England's rivals and enemies, it was victory.

Aristocracy, the class system, had flourished in England by the means that any system flourishes, by delivering the goods on the spot. If in times past it had been guilty of delays, waste, hesitation—such things as had left General Gordon to his fate at Khartoum—it had always got its head again and gone on to mastery. It had not hesitated to take leaders from wherever it could find them; now it hesitated too long, clinging to what it had, hoping against hope that the evil day would never really come. And men who looked thoughtfully into England saw in that hesitancy, that clinging and wishing, England's doom, and in the great recession of the Victorian tide the empty sands on which so much might had been engraved.

It was easy for foreign eyes to see that recession; it was harder to understand what could follow after it, and it was very hard to stand and watch it. We could not, as

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honest witnesses, see how England could be changed too much without great evil and suffering to many who had done nothing to deserve it. We had no burning faith in revolutions; it did not seem to us that a better world emerged from setting class against class and countrymen against fellow countrymen—the shoeless peasants of Czarist Russia did not seem to be so wonderfully surpassed by the countermarching peasants of Stalin nor the Spanish people greatly benefited by falling into the Franco pit, pushed from behind by the “democracies.” In a frail and aging picture, knocking the frame might only ruin the picture, but even in so sincere a sentiment it was not possible to avoid the haunting question: What have the powerful classes in England done in our time that they deserve to be saved?

For it seemed to us a matter of plain common sense that no one in the world was so privileged, so sanctified by time that he could maintain his privilege and respect without some compensating creative effort, some contribution to the good of his own people and the world. We could listen without conviction, as outsiders, to such laments as that of Dean Inge: “Another great war would destroy all I care about.” Yes, perhaps it would. And what was it Dean Inge cared about? Certainly not England, the great England that Americans had grown up with and loved. “It would complete the ruin of the class to which I have the misfortune to belong.” There it was again, the telltale mark on the wall. “It would bring to

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an end the pleasant, simple country-house life which is the fine flower of our civilization."

If he were bold enough, or crude enough, an outsider might ask, pleasant to whom? Not to us, aliens and outsiders, not to perhaps two score million Englishmen who had only seen a country house in a picture or walked through the fields to stare up its venerable oak-shaded drive. The fine flowers of Cliveden and other country houses were filling the pages of the press in perilous days, and their perfume was none too sweet, more like that of cabbages after a heavy rain. "It would give the coup de grace to the public schools which are already in difficulties." But how many decent little lads in England were attending those great dormitories of tradition and emerging clean-shorn, stiff, and devitalized for no purpose at all? The reason for the public schools had vanished with the world that had also vanished, and putting it down to this war was a defect in Dean Inge's reasoning as well as his time sense.

"The England that would emerge from a great war would be a country in which I would be sorry to have to live." That was also true. But what men who had lived as close to England as we had and seen so much and loved so many things that we saw, would mourn the passing of Dean Inge's class, or the men of his sentiments who had slowly, with no man to stand against them, brought England first to Munich and then to the pit?

25.

FOR AFTER ALL WAS SAID AND DONE—by us in our unenlightenment or by others who might have known better—it was not the English upper classes of today who had built the ships and fought the battles and written the books and sung the songs that had carried the name of England on all men's lips around the world. Nor was the present Prime Minister of England, "a good Lord Mayor of Birmingham in a lean year" by Lloyd George's description, a Pitt or a Canning or even a Palmerston. He was an old man, perhaps honest in his own way, undoubtedly stubborn, with an uncanny instinct for falling into traps. His advisers and associates, as they appeared to us, were also old men without much life in their faces and no great evidence of blood in their veins.

And it was not Mr. Chamberlain, who after all might be quickly replaced, but the condition that such leadership implied that was important. It did not seem to us to matter more than temporarily how these men were shifted about or replaced by others like them from the top or middle drawers of English society. The significant fact was that they were still there, supported on the shoulders of the City of London and the investing classes, large and small, at a time of singular national peril which was soon to end in war. Even more significant was the fact that they were a certain kind of men, powerful

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men, but not the kind who could have built or ruled vigorously and wisely the empire that they had inherited.

On the scores of vitality, creativeness, sheer inventive force, the Americans and Canadians of today, with their mixture of races and perhaps on account of the very mixture, were closer to the Elizabethans of England from whose loins the empire and the glory of England had sprung than were the present inhabitants of the British Isles. That was a truth that no intelligent traveled Englishman would undertake to challenge seriously. The impact of American ideas, research, machinery, drama and literature on twentieth century England was all around us in those years, plain for all eyes to see but few minds to admit except reluctantly, grudgingly. Yet, if we really were all one great English-speaking family and if we granted to England her greatness, supremacy in the past, and acknowledged our debt to her for institutions that have changed history, why be grudging about the present? A façade of old things was not a temple because old men walked behind it swinging censers. It was still less a temple when able Englishmen were pointing out how the smoke continued to blind the eyes of the worshipers. It might become a temple again if and when architects of the modern English spirit seized on the design of the world around them and adapted it to English purposes. It might even be that Englishmen would have to turn from the façade to build a temple on some new site.

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To us who had come to England to learn from England and not to set one way up against another, some of this was sad, for the old hand of envy gripped the neck of co-operation and there might have been a co-operation of spirit across the seas if nowhere else. But it was also possible to wonder, underneath the sadness, if all that it meant was not significant of a spirit; if the balance between the Old World and the New World, the balance of enterprise, vigor, inventiveness, had not really shifted within the time of living men with all too few honest witnesses to testify to it, if there was not that in the island spirit today that was folding back on itself in the afterglow of its own great age and seeking its own long slumber.

England might win a war, England might be saved, and to us considering our quiet life in England and the things we had found there in those years, it seemed desperately undesirable that England should lose. But in that sense, perhaps, we were partisans, and there were millions of other Americans who did not share that point of view, who had not had the good fortune to enjoy those quiet hills, the gentle neighborhood of the farm in Sussex, whose outlook was confined to their own hills and fields. But whether England won or lost, there was the thought fastened deep on the minds of people who had lived long in England and seen much and loved much they had seen that without new blood, new impact from outside,

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England as the head of empire must finally be succeeded by some more vigorous part.

And no one who had seen the class walls growing taller to keep more things out and had sensed, even dimly, the stirrings of a growing class hatred and watched the determined zeal of the rulers of England to chase out every idea that did not emerge from the curious stiff lips of the City, the property holders, the Venetian merchants, the privileged groups, could imagine how or from where that new blood and impact would come.

That was what the great tide, drawing back, revealed to us—the strong shapes of England's past rising shadowy from shoals where life had once stirred.

When your house is finished, you have no further need for the builders, architects and carpenters. England and the empire were finished things. As long as there had been need for builders, they had been there: the need had created them as a real need creates real things. And the need had created an educational system adapted to them, the old public-school education of England. Again one could not look at those lovely, somnolent medieval places where the privileged youth of England was still nourished and say that, in the past, they had not played their part. What rules and laws had been expounded there were the sheer root necessities of empire building: pluck, virility and courage, and hanging together, hanging together at all costs. No place for imagination; no

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place for the more sensitive fires and flames of adolescence, they had turned out a species narrow, smooth, resolute, hard, perfectly adapted to living in climes and carrying out laws where imagination would have wrecked them. The great driving force in the building up of empire had been this lack of imagination of what other people felt and thought. It had been both bad and good in its way, this enormous power of England over weaker peoples all over the globe.

Now one could look down a Sussex lane or out of a farmhouse window, and see those same perspectives, driven into the deep past, the public schools of England, the spires and towers of Cambridge, so bemusing to the mind that loved best the book of the ages, and yet could turn with a sigh from every living, vital book.

WITH THE EVENTS OF 1938 AND 1939 had come a subtle change in our own feeling and position, unimportant people that we were, in the setting of manor, fields, village and lane. Our farmhouse overlooking the round hills and meadows and woods that the love of men and centuries had carved and patterned was an abiding place no longer. We could not plan to base our lives on it any longer. In our imaginations it had become more like a watchtower set for us to look abroad at the England of today. In a long, detached scrutiny, we believed, lay much that ought to be known to Americans if they were to appraise and value rightly their relation to England and the great European world.

Perhaps all that any scrupulous American on the other side of the ocean, far away from us in our rural setting, could read on the surface of England between the time of the invasion of Abyssinia and the outbreak of the present war was that she was not so sure of herself, not so strong, not so clever or resourceful as Americans had been brought up to believe. Yet that assumption could and might be made to appear to contain its opposite by the mere force of events. From time to time in her long history of class rule, England had thrown to the front leaders who, like Mr. Chamberlain, had stunned the world with their singular and unstudied ineptitudes and

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had then turned in her course and set the pendulum of her prestige swinging full again. It could and might happen again. A single, vigorous fighting voice, speaking the accents of old, resourceful England, might wipe the slate clean of that appeasement and those other "Chamberlainisms" under which a good part of England and the outside world had writhed in recent years. But whatever new voice spoke out in place of these discredited accents, whether the voice of Mr. Chamberlain himself denying himself or of a Churchill or an Eden, it would still be a voice directly deriving from England's past and offering little clue to her future.

For England would still be fighting her ancient historic battles, whatever the new terms, for the balance of power in Europe, for the preservation of her ancient prestige—on which depended her ability to maintain her empire and herself upright in the world—and for her old historic pattern and frame. And we believed, as most Americans naturally believe, that an upright England was in many ways a guarantee of a certain desirable way of life in many parts of the world. We believed that a Nazi- or Communist-dominated Europe (since one was only the reverse of the other and both now stood forth in their true metal), or a combination of the two, would set a bitter end to a spirit that had made Europe a source of infinite delight and benefit to Americans and bring to an end in Europe itself a way of living and of looking at life which could not be spared.

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And we could see that, truthful as we believed our growing picture of England to be, it was not the only picture and our values not the only values. For that matter, no two people in the world ever quite see the same thing at the same time. There was the vision the Old Squire of Clifton must have had; we could not see it as he had seen it. Even the son of the present Squire, as he walked his paternal acres in his draggled beret, must have had his vision. What it must be like, colored by ownership, dwindling income, a public-school education and the exciting pamphlets he was constantly reading on foreign affairs, most of them, unfortunately, from Nazi sources, we could not interpret. He saw something we didn't see; he saw the park, the fields, the woods of Clifton, rented out perhaps, but all his. The dilapidation did not affect him; he had grown up in it, and being part of a greater dilapidation, it was just that much easier to accept. If you are not going to do anything about certain conditions, what is the good in worrying about them? That was a way of looking at things, also a vision, and one that a great many English people have today.

We could not condemn them for it nor did we want to. An up-to-date, four-way highway in England would not have attracted us very much although it might attract those military authorities who had to transport men and materials across the country. We were glad of the haphazard inconveniences of the Sussex farm, for they were a relief to us by way of contrast and they gave a steady

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man a steady job. We were glad to see so much that in detail and as a whole contrasted sharply with what had replaced it in America. We were glad that men like Grimshaw and Barker and Roberts still existed to work and love the land and we saw how their love of their work ennobled them above those who worked only for a wage. We accepted these things as they were and liked them. We did not like the complacency and pretentiousness of people supposed to know better who viewed this condition as the only possible one in the world. For if much of the stagnation charmed us, awakened our memories and imaginations, enabled us to look on backgrounds we could not otherwise have seen, still to ignore it, or to deny it, or to stretch around it a façade of rhetoric was a sign of great decay in itself.

There was another thing and, we believed, an important thing. After all, leaks in cottage roofs, the conditions of surface drains, the general haphazard improvisation that lies back of much of the leisurely, easygoing charm of modern England, could not affect us much. How much less could it affect millions of Americans three thousand miles away who, when they did come to England in small numbers year after year, came to look at just such mossy and picturesque aspects of it as thatched roofs and the Beefeaters outside the Tower? Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and boiled potatoes eaten in snug inns in summer weather might only serve to remind the tourist how

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delightfully far back he was proceeding. Even the East End slums of London might only recall more vividly the pages of *Oliver Twist*.

No amount of neglect, high and low, of the more physical side of the English system could possibly affect an American far away from it; stagnation, in the sense of a complete detachment from his own time spirit, could only charm him. They were serious conditions to us and worthy of note, if only because we happened to live with them and had to contrast the chilblained hands, frost-bite, dripping noses and rheumatic joints of cottage children with the flowery, mossy appearance of their abodes in summer. But no avoidance of reality for the sake of stillness in time or the picturesque could sidestep the implications of a greater neglect and haphazard—the neglect of those deep, ancient, fundamental institutions which gave England an attraction to American eyes far below the surface of glamour, royal tours, and other picturesque appeals.

For we had the opportunity of seeing, more plainly than Americans who had never lived there during long fateful years, that the care of democracy was not well left in the hands of those who did not care. The great free institutions that England had built through the ages, the Parliamentary system itself which she had bequeathed to mankind, were no longer a deep or weighty concern of powerful Englishmen. If, indeed (and this we did not know), they ever had been. What *did* concern these

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people were investments at home and scattered abroad, over the face of the earth, to the tune of £3,500,000,000—£500,000,000 in Australia, £450,000,000 in Canada, £438,000,000 in India, £372,000,000 in the Argentine, £248,000,000 in South Africa, £236,000,000 in Turkey, £160,000,000 in Brazil, £146,000,000 in New Zealand. These were the accumulations of England's great industrial era, the era that had coincided with the reign of Victoria and must remain in all men's eyes as it still remains in all Englishmen's hearts, the great age of England, after the Elizabethan epoch. And the greatness and might of England today was concerned with protecting that investment. The anxious fervors with which statesmen in power watched over these things and their imperial interests meant that other things must simply obey the laws of chance, go by default or drop by any wayside of day-by-day improvisation and policy.

The great institutions that England had built and bequeathed were safe in the hearts of certain humble people in England who believed what they had been taught to believe, whose minds, unvexed until the international crises of the thirties, were never troubled, whose education led unfaltering in the ways their fathers had walked, whose instinct was to look up to Master for guidance and the rewards of a simple faith. They were safe in hearts like this, and also in certain English minds that had looked deep into the aging Victorian mind and frame of England and saw the threat of a great sterility

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there, who spoke out when they could in Parliament and press, whose words when we heard them were deeply worth pondering by us and by all Americans, who believed sincerely and firmly that, if England had stood up at the time of Munich and before, the world would not be where it is today, who were in a grave minority at just that time when England and the whole world of free-thinking men needed them most. They saw, far more clearly than we saw, the threat not only to them but to their children and all English children, a threat stretching far beyond the smoke of the present bloodshed and turmoil, the threat of the Chamberlain innuendo. They waited for the bold gestures, the free strokes of policy that would tell them that England, their England, was a live, living, caring force in the world, and they waited, as we waited, in vain. They watched, as we watched, the barometric fall of foreign policy, the chill in the air that determined a Franco victory in Spain, a giving-in to Hitler at Munich, a determination to try to set Germany and Russia at each other's throats, a determination that showed plainly a state of mind—that only by such means could the empire be saved from the Nazis or from the groundless fear of revolution penetrating within.

They feared, as we feared, that a policy like this, born of a narrowness of bank directors' minds, and investors' enthusiasms, would someday, of itself and without foreign interference, determine the end of empire as a free-functioning, free-governing group of nations, and of free

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institutions within England itself. They looked up, as we looked up, at the great tree of old England and saw one by one the sere leaves of her old institutions and free prerogatives drifting to the ground; in laws pressed through a torpid or half-willing Parliament, in acts limiting the freedom of expression, in statutes like the Official Secrets Act, in hints and innuendoes that caused newspaper editors to scurry to shelter and that spread a veil of fine, impenetrable mist between the eyes of the average Englishman and the truth of what was happening and being thought in his world today. They saw, felt and feared the creeping paralysis in thought and expression, the angry rejection of criticism, the face-saving devices after Munich and Prague, the nervelessness and sterility that is the forerunner of fascism; and measuring their old freedoms and assertions in the light of this feeling, saw that both were failing. They knew that the England of tomorrow would never be the same as the England of today or yesterday.

Part VI
The Time of England

England through many long, anxious, perilous days, and to ears that even in the quiet of the Sussex farm were never far from the sound and whisper of old, sere leaves, it had been a strangely autumnal, a strangely twilight picture, this England of the modern world now standing embattled and on guard again. Often it seemed to us that the spirit that could do so much and see so little was grappling with the shadow of some faint, foretold doom, distant still, far ahead in time. Could there be anything to the future of Tory England except the future of a very old problem child? When it came to the final showdown, would the owners not pull the whole house down rather than give up a single room of it?

In the past England had been spared revolution because it had created revolutions—revolutions in industry, in political science, in thought—and kept itself a fraction in advance of them. Oppression and reform had marched side by side, and because the world heard a great deal of one it had seen less of the other. And also England had been spared revolution because England had cared—not about its international honor especially—honor between nations being what it has always been—but about its people, about its homes, about England. And now we saw, or thought we saw, that they did not care, not strongly, not enough.

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In that small, warm cave where we had often sat, at the Grimshaws' or another of our cottage neighbors, under those beams that the hands of five centuries ago had laid, in that place that had grown very dear to us, that had been handed down piecemeal from the past of England, that was now dissolving in an age that no longer cared for the real value of such things, what was it that we saw and heard? Outside the wind and the storm, defining England exactly as she had always been defined, by wave-lashed coasts and angry surrounding seas. Now all that that voice of moving darkness proclaimed was that England had suddenly become the most vulnerable part of Europe, from within and without. So many old hands had slackened, so many old heads had lost their true, instinctive faith and foresight. Before us in the lamplight was the raw twitching mask, the palsied half-face that was all that had been left to John Graw after the first World War. With the years and the slow rural life, it had taken on an expression of detached calm like the face of a broken rock on a hillside. When he spoke, a young man still, it was in the voice of one who has seen straight ahead to the end of his time and can still keep on walking. When his face twitched in protest against many things that were happening, it was the gesture of a man who brushes aside a fly, knowing that it will come back and settle again. He did not care very much. If things were so, they had to be so. Time moved and be-

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hind time stood the spirit with a lamp in its hand, throwing the shadow forward.

Behind Mrs. Grimshaw's broad, strong, plain face, bent over her sewing, loomed the powerful shoulders and lean red face of Grimshaw the foreman, relaxed after a day in the fields doing the work that he loved above everything else in the world, the work that held him to the land as a lodestone holds iron to itself. Between them crowded up in memory the other faces of the farm and village and the bright, merry faces of the cottage children in the lane. And all around them crowded those ghost faces whose names the Grimshaws knew so well: the Old Squire on horseback cantering down the fields, the Old Squire on foot moving through the copses, and the two ladies whose feet in their light slippers had led Mrs. Grimshaw such a dance down the long silent corridors of Clifton Hall. Yes, they were all there, those people, and more powerful even than those people, their ghosts, all held there before our eyes and imaginations in a single, warm, lamplit cave cut out by ancient walls from the moving, tossing darkness around us that on nights like this smothered the whole of England under a single, twitching, black blanket. What to us was great, moving with all history behind it like the wake of a ship left for miles behind, was to them a little place. It must be so, it could not be otherwise. The ghost fingers touched the walls of life and dropped back nerveless. Looking ahead,

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one saw the face of nightmare; looking back, one saw the faces of ghosts.

Only an "Old Squire," if he could have been delivered out of his grave complete in riding boots, with his straight defiant eyes boring out at the world from his whiskered face, might have done something about it. That was the conclusion that escaped those tight calm lips around us—and it was no more than a sigh, no more than the flick of a strong, work-worn hand by the fire. Was there something in it, something symbolic in that equestrian figure riveted so deeply in people's minds in the slow ruin of the rural oasis that lay around us? Once England had ridden the night and the storm; once, long ago, men had only thought of the little island as a saddle to fling over the back of the challenging sea and wind, had never thought otherwise, and mounting, had ridden.

The Sussex farm had meant to us in those latter years a frame for one long, retrospective glance on England and Europe. What some go to Oxford or Cambridge to learn, we had tried to learn in that small setting, fixed to its place and time in a great historical continuity that to our eyes seemed to be yielding, giving up. Woods, fields, cottagers, village people had been our classroom and instructors, and though they could not tell us the whole story, though there remained great gaps in our knowledge, still we believed they had told us much.

We might now stay in England or go, since our pres-

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ence there had only the validity of the honesty of our search. The old farm in its setting of pastel freshness under the trees and below the hills might await our return or stand still in our memories. But we should never again be strangers to the glamour or beauty or the harsh, sterile underside; the lanes that led to the fields or the lanes that led to the black, gaunt walls of England.

We could not impose our vision on other people because they would not believe us. If we had told our story straightly, the truth of it would appear. It would not appear to men in a hurry seeing and seeking only wave-tops in the tide of change, of dire events succeeding each other like surf in a storm. Only the slow-motion camera of history, passing back and forth over these things in the future, would show them in their entirety or their exact interrelation, one to the other. Empires and supremacies grew like men on laws that postulated their decline. We had tried to think of things in the greater scene around us this way and it had made other things in the picture simpler. Once a thing touched its zenith, the decline began. No man could piece together a picture of imperial England today within or without, however fragmentary, and not realize that the recession had been for a long time well under way. The question was not the desirability of this or the undesirability of it; the question was the problems it raised, in England and in the English-speaking world outside.

The blow to that old heart, that once-stout heart, that

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still free and at least partly determined heart, might come from without. But it was much more likely to come from within, and slowly, over a time that might extend far beyond the moment and the appearance of the moment, and men's hopes, fears, prejudices and passions of the moment, slowly like the seed and the harvest, the change and stillness of the anxious seasons through which we had lived, or like the oak in the park, the loss of sap in trunk and limbs, the fractional appearance of strength in the hardening fiber and boughs, and one by one the sere leaves falling.

Wherever we looked ahead the image of the farm in Sussex still stood there quietly, engraved on our minds. In nothing that we had seen or thought was there cause for self-righteousness or self-congratulation. In nothing less than the truth, known deeply to thoughtful men in England, was there hope for a real orientation of American eyes on England in time of strain as deep as this.

What England was today, lacking the seed of change or growth, largely sterile in spirit and ruled by a narrow, self-satisfied group whose actions in the recent past had deeply compromised the future of England, could not set aside the value of England and could no more than frame the picture of a greater life striving, a trifle sadly, a trifle wearily, but sometimes with manifest courage and faith in the face of blackening horizons, to touch new waters of life with old wands. Where change was not, did

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not exist, was frowned upon, other things could and did exist. What was life if one could not stretch out one's limbs in it? All the jostling eagerness and expansion of American life that we loved so well, and that now seemed to us the hope of the future, still had much to profit from a picture drawn in the colors of the sunset, older than time.

And looking back that way, there were times when England, all of England that we had known and thought about, seemed to merge and dissolve in those ancient, wistful, faded tints of field and farm, of manor and hill, with the palpable mist hovering over them everywhere. At such times it seemed that even the great insincerities, the sea-locked vanities, the strife and sterility in England today, which war would only deepen, were part of the same pastel-shaded, half-spoken negatives. The unsolved problems of the future of England and the empire were like the night that came with a rush of rain and wind across the hills. So many young eyes must open on England today and hear this and that, see this denying that in a great black-out of the spirit and see that it was all a game of blindman's buff. So many lives must wind their way along old grooves, dusty grooves in infinite peril, in the patience of a quiet frustration. Is it to be wondered that they should stare over their spectacles at an impatience like ours with headshaking speculation? Some bitterness of memory must always touch the old, remembering what their own youth has been. In a world of blind

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hate and cruelty there is less understanding in old eyes, perhaps, and more pathos, where all the conserving forces of life can only see in the mirror their own faces ambiguously staring back.

Still, with the Sussex farm and those slow, steady, tranquil people behind us, we could think of these things calmly. What we owed to the Tory classes of England was nothing at all. They were still, in our minds, side by side with other destroyers of the European spirit, less vicious, less aggressive, the kind of people who by striving to hold all must lose all for themselves and others with a deeper sense of life's tragedies. Still we could look behind them, over their shoulders, to the quiet, satisfying picture in its quiet frame, those hardy people of field and shop, those men who lived their lives in the good of their toil in no man's fear or favor. From them we had learned our greatest lesson in self-respect. To them and to them alone we owed a duty. To speak the truth, to rely on ourselves as sturdily as they did, to try to build our world of work and play as steadily as they had built theirs, to know in doing this and this alone we should never betray them or ourselves.

28.

AND LOOKING BACK AGAIN THAT WAY, we could see merging into those blended colors and edgeless shades the shape of the great uneasiness of our own American life that seeks so often and so ceaselessly to lose itself in something deeper than itself. We sought to elude our own destiny by following a destiny not our own. So much of the storybook past of England and Europe dwelt in our minds and consciousness, like old petals in a drawer, only waiting the gusts of passion or bewilderment to blow them through heads that should be steadily consulting their own vision. Well, we had walked in and out of that book; we had seen the pictures rising to meet us from every cottage, village and lane, and we had stared through those pictures and seen the other side, not, perhaps, because we had wanted to, but because we had to. And now we could close the book, if we wished, and pass our hands over the cover and turn and weigh it in our hands. And what was in it for us; what did it all amount to?

It was this: that the curious yearning and clinging of much American vision to the mythic and time-defying qualities of British supremacy would not work. It was a net cast afar into shallow seas. It was an assumption built out of a thousand inborn reveries and imaginings, a legend grown from the sticks and stones of a great

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literary consciousness that had no real foundation in the shifting and teacherous quicksands of everyday life and living in the England of today. So much had we learned, so much had been impressed on us day after day in our years in Sussex. The vision that would look abroad, escape, avoid the common nexus of its own good and evil, worship those things of which it had no instinctive grasp, seek a strength it lacked in its own tradition, had no real meaning.

If our reasoning and observations were even partly right, then British world supremacy up until the war that would break it down or give it another brief span of artificial life could be taken for granted today only by those to whom the British frame for the world picture was the only and inevitable one. This, as far as we could see it, was far from a question of good or evil; it was the simple algebra of time that shows men of tomorrow how little grasp men of today actually have on the fluctuating world around them. That frame of empire and supremacy had also been part of, and fundamental to, our own education. Yet the first thing and the last thing and the only consistent thing that had been impressed on us during all our life in Sussex was the need for working ourselves loose from all prior assumptions, greatest and chief of all the assumption that the world would look to our children as it looked to us. The only reasonable or even possible assumption based on the facts was that it would only remotely resemble it.

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And we, too, in America, were part of a rapidly changing world picture. Were we deliberately blinding ourselves to the alternatives that would catch us up, blindness or no blindness? America was engaged in a huge, inevitable task of inner reconstruction, as much testing whether or not the nation would endure as anything in our history. Those who sought to direct American thought first and foremost to the vast, unsolved problems, the social devastation, panic and misery of hundreds of thousands of their fellow countrymen, swept from their homes by a havoc no whit less destructive than the havoc in Finland, did no more than their honest duty. On top of our own unsolved problems, were we the fittest people in the world to solve problems whose implications we understood only in terms of our own emotional bravado? We had seen what half measures led to: deceit, treachery and wishful thinking; the whole vast field of left-handed sowing on one side, from Abyssinia through Spain to the morbid and fatal hour of Munich; and beyond Munich, to the war; and we had seen what other hands stood ready with sharpened scythe and set trained muscles to cut and gather the harvest.

Well, and what did it mean to us? Were we prepared to go to the last dollar in our banks, the last drop of American blood, the last farthing of our own hard-won inheritance, to nourish and support and continue in force the shaken edifice of British world domination? If we really were thus prepared or preparing, was there anything

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at the end of it but just the gigantic suicide pact of all Western civilization that some men had prophesied? If we were not so prepared, were we healing our own inner wounds, sounding and testing ourselves, educating ourselves and our children for the new, strange look of the world that would follow?

Here were the horns, then, of the unhappy and brutal dilemma that we Americans were drifting into through our own time lag, inertia and wishful thinking. If Humpty-Dumpty slipped from the wall, were we prepared with all our horses and men to set him right again: and if we did or could set him right, what of the wall, the shaken ground, the fissures?

To quote the most conservative estimate of such deeply conservative observers as Dean Inge, England could only emerge from the war through a deeply involved process of self-ruin. What was our part in that ruin, or in the vast reconstruction that must follow after? Where was our support to be given and at exactly what level in the English political scene? Should we be fighting to restore the English empire investment to par? Far more impractical reasons for engaging in war had been evolved in the past. Or should we seek to enforce our own conception of democracy on England by withholding support from the Tories and giving it to the Labor Opposition? Or should we support England at all times, at all costs, thus rounding out and completing the logic of our picture of a world impossible without an empire frame?

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Who would attempt to solve these problems for us? Who would dare in his heart of hearts to do more than pose them? And who would say that in sowing the wind with the seeds of our own blindness, blindness within, blindness without, we should do more, ourselves, than reap the whirlwind?

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